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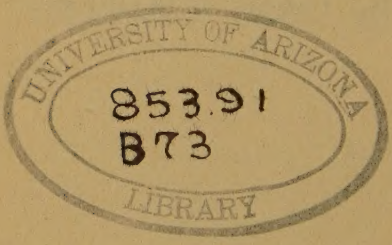

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE life of Filippo Rubè, up to his thirtieth year, had not apparently been different from that of any number of provincial youths who descend upon Rome with a lawyer's degree, a wooden trunk and several letters of introduction to deputies and business men. As a matter of fact, however, he had brought with him something else of his own, to wit, a logical mind capable of splitting a hair into four, an oratorical fire that burned his opponent's argument to the bone, and a certain faith that he had great things in him. This had been implanted in his heart by his father, who was the communal secretary at Calinni, and who, well acquainted with his *Æneid* in Latin and the life of Napoleon in French, considered everybody in the world —beginning with himself—an intruder with the exception of geniuses and heroes. But Filippo's entrance into the office of the honourable Taramanna had done him more harm than good, so great was the oppression of that swarthy, powerfully-built man, who stood head and shoulders above him and took away his sunlight. Although his own eloquence was keener and his preparation more exact, he felt crushed by this grammarless, unlearned fellow who crashed through obstacles without even noticing them, with the stride of an elephant in the jungle, and who, when his pupil was perorating before the Tribunal like a Mirabeau, fashioned paper boats with a spontaneous indifference not born of envy. At times, in the evening, Filippo would grow excited expounding to him his plan for winning a suit or deciding a political struggle; but Taramanna, who was getting impatient for his game of poker, would listen, standing, and after letting him reach his climax, would place his hand upon the young man's shoulder and, bursting into a most unamiable Negro guffaw, transfix him by concluding: "Magnificent! But that isn't the way life goes."

How it went, and what life really was at all, Filippo would

ponder over the next morning after gazing into the mirror with eyes that were somewhat hollow and hallucinated in solitude, but which, in company, he made an effort to tame so that they might seem normal to his clients and his colleagues. Life was certainly not his profession; of this, after a sleep thronging with weary images, there was left in his head neither more nor less than what remains within a bell after it has ceased to strike. During the day he would wax enthusiastic over it, and often he lived through brilliant hours; but late in the evening, as he thrust his key into the lock of his furnished room, he would be seized by a sudden shudder, as if beholding his soul in the likeness of a tent after the equestrian circus had given a performance: an infinite yawning space littered with cigarette ends and orange peel.

At other times the life that he would have wished to understand burdened him like a bundle that some one had entrusted to him without revealing its contents nor ever returning to relieve him of it; it irked him like a letter turning yellow as it waited for reply. But he had no time to answer it. Before viewing the panorama at his ease and recognising the various places, he must reach the top of that steep, unshaded ascent that was called the conquest of bread and of those other victuals no less indispensable than bread. His father continued to send him punctually every month two hundred-lire notes, perforating them with a bit of twine whose ends he fixed with pretty seals of wax to the envelope of the registered letter; this he did in so austerely meticulous a fashion that it seemed an admonition and Filippo never opened it until he really needed to.

But despite the many praises of the judges and of his acquaintances, he toiled away merely to triple that sum; and if he had a new suit his hat was a trifle soiled, and when his cravat was spick and span his patent-leather shoes were sure to be somewhat cracked, so that evenings, when he sat conversing on the Taramanna's damasked sofa, it behooved him not to cross his legs comfortably lest the liberty lamp show up mercilessly every wrinkle and defect. It provoked him, too, turning the corner of his street after midnight, to see the light from the city arc splashing over the closed windows of his

deserted room, and he would have preferred to catch the reflection of a green shade beside which a young wife would be awaiting his return. He had only to make his choice of Taramanna's five daughters; but when they all laughed at once, as if distributing the parts of a canon, or when they all swarmed through the streets garbed in the same flowered silk muslin, it seemed impossible to marry any one of them without taking upon himself the entire household.

In short, his adolescence he recalled as one recalls the murmur of a mountain stream; and now it seemed as if those waters had stagnated, and become a broad, swampy lake reflecting pale reeds along its hazy shore. Often, and particularly on returning home, an inner uneasiness, which he refused to attribute to his weak stomach, told him that things would not continue so, and that sooner or later the waters would be gathered between narrower, more precise banks, and the course of his life would reacquire a direction and a harmony. He had been visioning a passionate love affair or a fortunate electoral campaign, now that he was old enough to present himself at Calinni, and was overwhelmed instead by two events as unexpected as they were diverse. The first was the sudden death of his father, who left the widow and the two spinster daughters (this seemed the fate of the Rubè women) in straits too dire for any one to consider unjust the action of the deceased in making the three women usufructuaries of all his possessions, reserving for Filippo, beyond his lawful portion, a golden key-watch.

The registered letter did not arrive on the first of July, but came ten days late; this time it was thicker than ever, containing seven hundred-lire notes and one fifty, together with a letter four sheets long from his sister Sofia, who recounted in detail the last days of their father, afterward describing at length the daily life of the three survivors. A dark life it was, with the recent loss, their economic insecurity and the exacting burdens of farm and administration that weighed upon mamma's shoulders. A visit from their brother would help console them, but they understood that he had no time and that the expenses would

be too great. In a postscript she asked for news of the half revolution that had taken place in Rome and in Romagna that June. At Calinni things were quiet. Then along the margin of the sheet she added, as if it had occurred to her at the last moment, that the seven hundred and fifty lire were sent by mamma, poor thing, to pay for his mourning, and that she was sorry she couldn't make it more. Filippo thought he understood, and after having deposited the sum with the Postal Savings Bank, as if he were ashamed to take such a trifle to a regular institution, he scribbled a short note two pages long in which, with studied precision, he begged his mother to give herself no further trouble, and renounced, until he should need it for a family of his own that was still in the future, the income from his legal share.

Whether he did this out of genuine brotherly and filial pity or through pure irritation or through the lazy desire not to have any accounts to go over and disputes to settle, he himself could not have told, as he dropped the letter into the mail-box, and remained for an instant with his hand open and suspended as if he could take the letter back. Generally he interpreted his own actions and thoughts in the most unfavourable sense, and he could not forgive himself for not yet having mourned his father with tears. So that when there came to him a sort of certificate of merit, to which his mother—who did not write often because she was not highly educated—together with Sofia and Lucietta had signed their names one after the other, and in which they had declared him the family benefactor and prayed to God for the prosperity of her golden-hearted son, he crumpled the sheet and thrust it deep into his inside pocket, running to the window so as not to feel the flames of remorse that burned his cheeks.

The other event befell on the last day of that month of July. At times, toward the end of the afternoon, he was in the habit of visiting the villa just outside of San Giovanni, which the Montis had named La Rustica; and indeed, with the exception of a double row of slender acacias and a bed of dahlias whose purplish velvet was the favourite spot for the road dust when the sirocco sent it whirling in eddies, it con-

sisted only of a kitchen-garden, a poultry yard, and a vine-yard that rolled down a short slope whence could be viewed, as from a balcony, the pearly calm of the landscape. Filippo liked this fusion of hues and sounds into an eternity oblivious of all things; even more, although he often struggled against its fascination with an uneasiness hard to fathom, he liked the company of Federico Monti, who had received his medical degree three years before, yet continued quietly to study medicine from books and was in no hurry to establish himself in the city and practise his profession. Filippo felt the superiority of his friend in his tall stature, from which his friendship seemed to condescend without giving itself entirely, and contemplated in dull-eyed meditation Federico's magical serenity, which was crossed from time to time by a flash of accumulated energy, as the summer sky by lightning. He never spoke willingly with his friend of his physical ailments, particularly during the past two months when his stomachic pains had spread beyond endurance and when at times he was assailed by feverish attacks that compelled him to twist his fingers to keep from asking help; at sight of Federico, however, he would smoulder with resigned rancour.

He preferred to find Federico alone with his mother and the regular women friends who came to visit them. Then he would sit down in the osier easy-chair, the centre of a circular smile that seemed a continuation of the smile that had greeted him on the previous visit; he would sip his glass of tea; he would refuse the crackers; then, arising suddenly, he would go over to Federico, who remained leaning against the door-post, take him by the arm, and lead him back and forth along the row of pear-trees, confiding to him in turbulent impetuousness many of the feelings and thoughts that seemed disquieting and peculiar to him alone, while his companion listened calmly and complaisantly as if there were nothing new under the sun. But on the 31st of July, as he opened the wooden gate, he glimpsed indistinctly a small throng of visitors that filled him with misanthropical timidity and would have impelled him to seek escape if he had had more courage, and if Federico, who as always was leaning against the door-post, had not espied

him hesitating at the end of the short avenue of acacias, and shouted to him gaily:

"Ohè, Filippo! We were just waiting for you!"

Around the small table on the open veranda at the head of the seven stairs leading to the house were, as usual, the old Signora Monti and her friends, Eugenia Berti and Mary or Marietta Corelli. The eight or ten gentlemen with tea-cups in their hands or cigarettes in their mouths, scattered here and there on the steps or around the dry fountain in the little square beyond, were unfamiliar to Filippo, although he knew almost all of them. They were a band of students and artists headed by Antonino Bisi, a disengaged instructor in psychiatry who had wished to surprise Federico in his solitary retreat with an invasion of friends and acquaintances, and who was now bustling importantly about from one to the other, with a flapping of academic folds and gesticulations reminiscent of Chinese shadows, so as to keep the conversation going.

"We've been having a discussion," explained Federico to Filippo. "Naturally, about the war. Now that it's a sure thing, all of us, without caring to confess it, wish that it'll break out soon so that we can see the show. You know how impatient the audience gets when the curtain's a bit late in rising. I was put in mind of a feeling that you once explained to me with the merciless precision of a physician. When there's a very sick person in the house and one's watching over him, he realises that half of him is really desirous of the sufferer's end, through some sort of solidarity with nature, through sympathy with the inevitable outcome. It's the same when folks part. These prolonged farewells at the station are a nuisance, and the one who's leaving, while he sticks his head through the window, thrusts his elbow against the side as if he would send the train on its way five minutes ahead of schedule."

The psychiatrist peered at Filippo over the rim of his glasses, and old Signora Monti blushed slightly at thought of their guest's mourning apparel and Federico's perhaps unwitting cruelty. But Filippo, with the air of one who must dispel any revelation of that equivocal sentiment, plunged into the politi-

cal conversation and turned it into every possible channel. The majority scoffed in superior fashion at all prognostications of war. This jumble of threats was nothing but a diplomatic trick, and the mediation of England would soon enough restore everything to order, settling the nasty mess with a good pull at Servia's ears,—and she deserved worse. "Modern civilisation," said Antonino Bisi, grandiloquently, shaking his left forefinger and rounding his lips as if he were sucking at something, "will not tolerate the outrage of a war." And in his own thoughts he added that it might postpone by several months a university competition which he had every reason to count on winning with a thesis, seven-hundred octavo pages long, on traumatic amnesia. But Filippo's demonstration of the inevitability of war was so many-sided and so conclusive that they all declared themselves beaten, some of them persuaded by the cogency of his arguments, others overcome by a logic that gave no quarter, weakening and wearying every will to oppose. Bisi pursued the course of his own thoughts, dissimulating his detraction by the occasional interjection of a "Certainly." At last, as Filippo glowed with the satisfaction of having proved beyond all cavil that Germany would be beaten, he went over and shook the lawyer's hand with congratulatory fervour, and telling his companions it was time for them to be going, concluded:

"Agreed. Germany will crush Russia. The Asiatic monster will be crushed. Germany will annex the Baltic provinces. Agreed?"

When the band of unexpected visitors had taken their leave and the crunching of their footsteps upon the gravel path was no longer heard, those who remained behind suddenly became aware that dusk had fallen. Filippo, who was standing near the steps, broke the silence with which everybody had greeted the change of the hour:

"Bisi has a Russian friend, and thinks that with Russia beaten, marital authority will profit by the defeat."

But the conventional smiles that greeted this inopportune remark disappeared with the last light of day. Shortly after, Eugenia Berti, who had said nothing up to that time, remarked

without stirring from the reed rocker on which she lay with her arms entwined above her head like an aureole:

"Papa says"—she was the daughter of a major of artillery—"that if there's really a war, modern explosives will shatter the world to bits."

Her words sounded together with the first strokes of the Ave Maria. Others followed, and the countryside which lay languishing for the new moon seemed discomforted by the pealing; so much did those chimes seem to soften the lines of the aqueducts and the hills which but a moment before had stood out in clear outline, and to diffuse from the grassy dells a dissolving caress. Filippo, who had sat down upon the lowest step with his head between his hands, like a beggar upon the threshold of a church, thought as he gazed toward the west that he could hear the hoarse confidences of the sea; and in the direction of Maccarese he imagined flocks of motionless sheep in the motionlessness of the hour and mounted herdsmen fairly petrified before the frontier. He could not recall so cool a July evening in the past five years, and, surrendering himself without reserve to the excess of sensations, he shuddered, as if summer had suddenly died, beheld the nude architecture of the Apennines stand out against the deep sky and saw the first stars, incredibly liquid and as coldly brilliant as on a January night, rise above the peaks. He transferred himself to the brightest of them, which was as large and abandoned as a glance of pity. From this eminence he looked down upon the Earth and the houses of men, beheld the rivers and plains of Europe darken in the humidity of the evening.

All at once it ceased to be an evening such as all the others that had settled over the face of the earth before, such as all the others that would follow. It was the 31st of July, 1914. The curtains of the heavens were drawn to reveal a stage upon which something impended that was already known to all, that had been decided *ab æterno,* before which every reparatory will was numbed. Yonder in a zone where the transparency of the summer day lingered more tenaciously, resembling a veil that had been forgotten by some nymph, an unwonted buzzing could be divined in its hiding-place amid

the foliage. From his lofty seat he knew perfectly well that this zone was the level forest splotched with swamps formed by the livid waters that meander along toward the Baltic. There, too, were mounted men firm before the boundaries. Bang! The first shot. There was one man who, first of all upon the face of the earth, had discharged his gun. Nobody would ever know his name. Filippo, beholding the shot, had himself mentally added the click of the trigger, as when one sees the lightning-flash and hears the thunder though the atmosphere does not carry the sound.

He had heard nothing across the cold transparency of space. He had only seen. And it seemed to him that that shot with which the war had begun was like unto no other shot, resembling neither the hunters' shots that describe a long dark plunge through the sky as if they were rebounding from their course, nor the shots at target practice, which crackle one after the other at exact, measured intervals, and least of all those which had zig-zagged through the city streets during the tumultuous uprisings of June and seemed like sonorous kernels enveloped in shells of silence that were fairly smothered in the soft heaps of refuse piled along the pavements by the strike. This, on the other hand, was light without sound. The shot had described a trajectory as wide as a province, embracing it as between the ends of a rainbow. It might have been likened to a very recent weapon that squirted a jet of molten glass, white, incandescent, bordered along its entire length by a greenish blue fluorescence. Summer recoiled before the cold wind. The constellations all around turned a trifle pale at sight of that terrestrial meteor.

This lucid delirium lasted but a few minutes,—as many as passed between the last words spoken and the good evening greetings. He did not care to remain with the Montis and their friends for dinner. He walked back to the city. He dined alone, without appetite, at a restaurant where nobody knew him, with a newspaper resting against a beaker as if it were a reading-desk; and as he chewed away against his will he read. The seven-column screamer announced the imminence of war with a sort of convulsive joy that made one's anticipa-

tion dance at the incomparable show in store. Even he was attracted in his own fashion. He felt that at last something big was happening,—much bigger than the death of his father, —and that the stagnant waters between the flat banks were to be stirred into motion. He had been moved to the depths by the strange vision that had come to him during the final moments spent at Villa Monti. Up to that time the war, which he had eagerly wished for ever since the day of the assassination at Serajevo, had been something interesting and external to him, an exciting game of the imagination and the intellect in which Germany, Russia, and all the others were ranged symmetrically in rows, ready to leap across at each other like the pawns in a game of chess. Now, after those moments of contemplation from his starry balcony, he had an obscure feeling that the war was the affair of man and his own, and his blood burned as with a poisonous beverage gulped down in haste. The war was no longer outside of him, but within; and its fascinating, exotic colours, once the potion had been relished, were transformed into an all-consuming agitation. The enthusiasm of curiosity was dimmed by a gloom that was neither terror nor pity, but might at least be called dismay.

Although he felt as bruised as if he had received a thrashing, he avoided the tram, where the close air and the human breath filled him at times with an impulse to throw himself out while the car was running at full speed. He walked home in a roundabout way, choosing unfrequented streets. Without turning on the light, he undressed hastily by the reflection of the arc lamp, dropping all his clothes at the side of the bed. For ten hours he slept with limbs inert, supine, his tongue bitter and swollen, without dreams, his fists clamped and pressed against his temples.

The August sun restored him to his routine surroundings. But the people swarming in the thoroughfares seemed to him in some way changed, more remote; and whatever he did that day was distorted, as in a convex mirror, by the new proportion things had assumed. That afternoon, in a notary's office, he noticed that a sort of panic had begun to spread, and that some people were filling their provision sacks while others were

withdrawing their deposits from the banks. Filippo objected, but an hour later, despite his reluctance, he too was swept into the stream, and at three minutes to four he entered the street office of the Mercede with the fear that he had acted too late. It occurred to him that the State, in the first throes of embarrassment caused by the turn of affairs, might have suspended payments, and that he would be left heaven knew how long without the seven hundred and fifty lire that constituted his entire fortune. That season had been slack, so much so that if he had been able to sever the loose, invisible ties that bound him to life in Rome and overcome the complicated boredom of mourning visits, he would have gone for the summer to Calinni, to see his women folk, to save expenses, to give himself an opportunity to recuperate. In the meantime, as this decision was postponed from week to week, that tiny sum guaranteed him a month and even forty days of liberty, if his earnings should stop for a while, or if his ailments increased to the point where he could work no longer. Above all, it relieved him of the nightmare of having to turn to Taramanna, Federico, or his mother through some unforeseen necessity; for various reasons all three sources were distasteful to him. In the vestibule he came upon men and women who were returning in the contentment of having rescued their money and trying to appear as if their minds were unconcernedly occupied with other matters. He arrived just in time to shove his pass-book across the counter as the clerk was lowering the grilled window.

At first the clerk made a gesture of refusal against the insolence that increased his work-day by two minutes; then, since he was after all a good-natured fellow, he decided to suffer it, and under the window that was already half down he counted out the eight notes. But, as he consulted the pass-book, without raising his glance, he said to his companion to the right who had already shut both his window and drawer:

"Seven hundred and fifty lire. One would imagine that the world's coming to an end to-night, and that they'll build another out of this paper."

Once the money was in his pocket, Filippo pretended to himself that he was in a great hurry to get out and to climb up Capolecase, as if summoned by some matter that could not be postponed, so as to dry with the stir of movement the wave of shame that had been poured over him by the cashier's comment. Now that he was secure for a few weeks, he again put off his visit to Calinni, and soon plunged heart and soul into the interventionist propaganda that as far back as the early days of September had found one of its headquarters in Taramanna's home. The deputy was a Mason. Rubè was not enrolled in any party, but since his school days he had absorbed classical ideas upon the grandeur of his native land, and now he combined them with other current notions of that justice which had been violated by the Germans. His own contribution was an implacable and almost obsessive logical demonstration that Italy's intervention was absolutely certain, and from this was deduced with mathematical precision the uselessness and the harm of delay and temporising distractions. So passionately was he persuaded of this truth that often it seemed to him a question of days or hours, and each new delay provoked him, like the defiance of an adversary in bad faith, to an irrefragable proof or to an array of geometrical evidence. The incredulity of some and the curious indifference of many inspired in him, during conversations and before small gatherings, a sarcastic and almost offensive vigour of speech that split with strident rasping the compact sonority of his voice and made him enemies rather than friends. Exceedingly pale, and rendered even more so by the lamp and the reflection from the green cover of the conference table, slightly stretched forward, with his right hand hidden, ready to extract from his pocket an ether tablet when the spasmodic contraction of the throat from which he had for some time been suffering threatened to cut his sentence in half, he would wave his left from time to time as if to scatter the vehemence of his perorations over the heads of the public. Taramanna, who conducted the propaganda in a different way, never seemed to have the time to be present. His daughters came with their mother. When the father did come along, he would stand with his hands be-

hind his back, leaning with all his weight against the main door, which was as tall as he, so that he could slink quietly away if the speech ran past his hour and interfered with his private affairs or his game of poker. So Filippo, in order not to see him leave, never looked toward that part of the hall.

In a professional way the campaign did him good. He was invited to address meetings outside of Rome, and his cases, as well as his fees, increased somewhat. But every new speech to be given in a hall was another torture, all the more cruel in that he regarded it as inconfessible, with that cold-sweated dismay which seized him midway in his address, making him imagine that he would be left stifling and voiceless before the court judges and the public as if an invisible hand were clutching at his throat. In a few months the number of ether tablets that were always indispensable was tripled, and to his other anxieties was added the fear that those placed nearest him might catch the odour of his words enveloped in those sinister fumes. He relied more than ever upon the friendship of Federico, who came to his political meetings even less frequently than Taramanna. Federico, one day, paying him a visit in his furnished room, where in order to find a seat one had to remove a heap of letters and books and place them upon the floor, gave his reasons.

"It was wrong of you," said Filippo, "not to have come yesterday. It was the best speech I've made so far."

"What's the use of coming?" replied his friend. "I know what you say, I agree with you, and I admire your eloquence. The war was inevitable, and Italy's intervention is necessary. It's ordained. But then, what's the sense of goading it, if nothing can prevent its following that road? You remind me of a doctor who has given up all hope for his patient and sits at his bedside making long speeches to him, urging him to die right way because death is a most beautiful thing."

Filippo expatiated upon his conception of the situation. But Federico's mind was elsewhere.

"Well, my dear Rubè," he added, after letting his friend disburden himself, "allow me to inform you that all of us who wish you well feel real concern at the way you're carrying on.

The condition of your mind and your health ought to dissuade you from this extravagance. You ought to make peace with yourself and accomplish the fine things we expect of your talent."

As he concluded he cast a furtive glance at the disorder of the room.

"I'm not very well and I'm a bit run down," replied Filippo, frightened to find himself the object of such close scrutiny. "But these are mere nothings that will pass away with a little fresh air, and I'll be equal to my duty."

"We all try to do our duty," retorted the other. "But the first duty of all is not to believe ourselves indispensable and not to force fate. We ought to stand at our post ready to do as we're ordered."

Whereupon Filippo, who was blinded by the need of diverting with some bit of impudence these suspicions as to his health and his strength, which he considered ruinous, turned his back almost entirely upon his friend, and remarked with an icy sneer:

"It's a very safe theory."

"What do you mean?" demanded Federico, rising a bit from the chair into which he had sat down familiarly astride, with his chest leaning against the back. "What do you mean? Do you think I said that out of selfishness? Or cowardice?"

When Filippo, struggling between punctilio and his desire not to wound irremediably a friendship of several years, hesitated several instants for reply, Federico, in order to keep the rage that was boiling inside of him from bursting into words, contracted all his muscles as if seeking a support against the back of the chair; the back broke and was left dangling in his hands. He fitted it accurately back on to the rest of the chair, and saying very formally, "I am displeased," he left before an act or a word of apology could reach him.

They no longer exchanged greetings, except when Filippo met Federico with Mary Corelli, whom many, without any foundation, said was engaged to the physician. She would answer Filippo's rigid doffing of his hat with a long smile that spread from her exquisite black eyes all over her person, within which she seemed to dance as if enveloped in a sunbeam.

This smile that from time to time trilled toward him unexpectedly now in the rear of Santa Maria degli Angeli, now near the narrow silent thoroughfare of Via Sistina, helped him greatly to live through a winter of desolate agitation; despite the fact that, upon analyzing it in his memory, he found it to contain, in addition to friendship and regret, an element of unhumiliating pity. In the meantime, the quarrel with Federico and the growing heat of the dispute between the partisans of intervention and those of neutrality, hastened his decision to volunteer, renouncing the exemption that he had obtained in his twentieth year because of his weak chest. Everywhere he announced his decision long before carrying it into effect, until it seemed that even upon the faces of strangers he could read reproach for the contrast between his bellicose professions and his unsacrificing existence. Taramanna, standing as usual with his head three-quarters averted, said to him:

"I'll go, too, when the time comes. But, holy patience, you might have waited a while longer!"

And he never mentioned the subject again.

Filippo communicated his resolution to Eugenia Berti, too, one day when he met her at a picture exhibition. In her voice as white as jessamine she asked:

"Why don't you enlist in the third regiment of artillery, where papa's a major? We leave very shortly for Veneto, and you might manage to be sent along with him."

He accepted her suggestion, and went at last to Calinni to procure his documents and take leave of his womenfolk. Sofia and Lucietta were proud of him; the doctor rolled down Filippo's lower lash with his finger and said that he thought the boy somewhat under the weather; the new communal secretary reproved him amiably, assuring him that after the death of Filippo's father, with those poor women left alone in the house, he wouldn't have thought the young man capable of such madness; but then he pressed his hand and promised to make him a deputy when he came back. Only his mother refused to believe him, and in order to calm her he had to explain (in his own heart Filippo could not say whether it were a pious lie or the genuine truth) that he would have been

drafted in any case, thus running the risk of going as a private in the infantry, while by enlisting immediately as a sub-lieutenant of artillery he was certain of less trouble and danger.

The worst ordeal of all was the day of departure, when Filippo followed his mother from room to room, accompanying her in all her chores; he could not find the voice, however, to tell her the harsh news that had been postponed until the last hour. He summoned courage in the garden, as she was bending over to gather leaves for a salad and there was no risk of her looking at him.

"Mamma," he ventured, "I know I've renounced everything, but during these few months of war I'll really be hard pressed. It's really for your sake that I'm taking the appointment as a sub-lieutenant, for if I were drafted as a private, you'd be burdened with my maintenance. Listen, can you do me the favour to send me, while the war goes on, as much as papa used to send?"

As a moment's silence followed his question, he added (but this time he knew that he was unjust toward himself):

"After the war, when I resume my practice, I'll return it to you."

"Let's hope that this cursed war won't last long," replied his mother, continuing to pick the leaves. "Let me know your address, son, and I'll send it to you. And don't keep me worried. Write to me. You mustn't be up to your old tricks."

So he returned to Rome and spent as much as he could afford on useful and useless supplies for his outfit. The final weeks were confused and impatient.

He was called to the colours at the beginning of May, and left in a dusk that seemed endless. Knowing that somebody would be there to see him off, he felt obliged to purchase a first-class ticket. At the station were Taramanna with his whole quintet of daughters; Federico, who had been dragged along by Mary and stood somewhat apart from the rest; and several other colleagues and acquaintances. On the platform the conversation turned exclusively upon his uniform, upon the hat which was no longer called kepi, on the burnished sword

that Filippo had acquired as an officer and that was as curved and heavy as a scimitar. Mary bustled about as restlessly as a swallow, so as to conceal with her agitation the stolidity of Federico, who had pressed Filippo's hand in silence and seemed determined not to utter a word.

He left five minutes ahead of time, for he feared he would lose the train. The compartment was vacant. Bisi, beholding him at the window, pale and as if consumed by a hidden affliction, approached and said:

"A fine thing, modern civilisation. A fellow can ride off to war comfortably asleep upon velvet cushions."

Then, reddening a little, he added:

"But you'll see, there'll be no war. At the last moment Italy will withdraw. And she'll make all the others declare peace."

As the train began to move Filippo, watching the group disappear, saw Mary linger on for an instant, waving her tiny handkerchief to him; Taramanna, three quarters turned toward the exit, was shouting some indistinguishable words. He moved his head in an inquiring manner, and Taramanna then imitated with his right hand the motions of writing upon his left. This meant: "If you need anything, write."

But Filippo was seeking a more difficult, more precise meaning in the gesture, and could not find it. At the very first bend, Rome and all his past disappeared from before his sightless eyes.

CHAPTER II

The first sensation he experienced after having ungirded his sword and stretched out full length upon the velvet seat was one of possessing time, space, freedom. The compartment was many times smaller than his furnished room on the Via dei Serpenti, but its only furnishing consisted of the regulation drawer upon the rack. There were no letters strewn over a disordered table and turned yellow waiting for reply, nor shirts with the laundress's account, two days old, laid across the sofa, nor books all over the floor. So that the narrow passage leading between the two seats from the door to the window seemed to him spacious and airy.

The light of the leisurely sunset lay over the countryside. No one,—client, colleague or committee president,—had a claim upon him any longer. Having surrendered himself entirely to the State, he felt that all bonds previously linking him to individuals had been severed. The journey ahead of him would take thirteen hours, as vast as a kingdom; he measured them; this unwonted solitude would in all likelihood be uninterrupted as far as Florence, save for the possible visit of the conductor. Eight or nine of these hours he would probably give to sleep, that refreshing sleep in which life's images are caressing and smiling, liberated from the trammel of the will. But four or five hours were left in which to have a talk with himself, to pay at last a visit to the gentleman named Filippo Rubè, to invite him to a regular confession, to an accounting. And not a financial accounting. For the first time since his childhood he was redeemed from the slavery of need. In the wallet which from time to time he felt, as if to test the solidity of a cuirass, there were several hundred-lire notes more than necessary. The thought of the origin of this security, of the two hundred lire that his mother would

send him monthly as long as the war should last, irritated him like the buzzing of a mosquito at his ear. But it meant security, soft and spacious comfort in which one might lie in open-eyed ease. The subsidy given by Calinni, added to his stipend as sub-lieutenant and to the numerous military comforts of table, lodging, and clothes, assured him, in short, complete liberty.

The liberty to speak of other matters, to see clearly into this turning-point of his career, which separated his new life from the thirty years of his previous existence with a line of demarcation far sharper than any other antecedent event! "Let's see, then. Courage, let's look into this. In short. After all is said and done. The truth of the matter is . . ." Long before he had come to anything like a definite conclusion, these resumptive formulas danced about and collided against each other in his brain with a slight, sharp impact, like a few nuts in a sack. He desired to recapitulate his past, to liquidate it even at the cost of bankruptcy, before entering into the brand new life that awaited him within his new uniform. But the account grew confused, disturbed by the rhythm of the train as it rolled over a landscape of oaks and olive-trees that stood out amid the softness of that almost nocturnal hour. Throb, throb, throb, throb; one, two, three, four; so came, in muffled accents, the systole and diastole of the piston, seemingly beating in time with those of his heart. It was, indeed, as if his blood were set in motion and his soul rocked by the lilting elasticity of the locomotive. Ever so gradually he felt himself become depersonalised, and he tasted the felicity of the journey, as drugging as opium fumes and similar to what he had imagined in moments of utter exhaustion, during which he would invoke some lethal disease such as typhus or meningitis that would exonerate him from the government of himself and turn him over to the direction of others. Often he had summoned the kindly malady that comes like a liquidating bankruptcy into the thickest of accounts that never return, and, if it spares the victim, sends him back convalescent to the light, restoring him like a serpent that has sloughed its skin, absolving him of the entire past, or blows him along at daybreak with a noiseless

breath. Now he found this justifying release in the mild vibrations of the speeding train. As it ascended the valley of the Tiber, the landscape dissolved into the gloom of the moonless evening. The starry night opened its pure and watchful eyes where death convoked its rigid allurements.

The thought of death brought him back to the story of his life,—to his need of taking account of himself during the brief eve that preceded his entrance into a new existence. In order to prevent distraction and to overcome the drowsiness that already lay its warm, caressing fingers upon his dishevelled hair, he divided this examination of his conscience into chapters. First he gave thought to his body, his health, to death. No, death was yet distant and indiscernible. Often during the past twelvemonth, he had imagined, with a shudder of horror, that it was upon him, amid the crises that darkened his eyes, shattered his knees, filling him with the mad sensation of an open gap near the loins across which his spinal fluid leaked out and dried up. But the doctors, as they said, reassured him. They spoke of exhaustion, neurasthenia, and particularly, dyspepsia. They attributed his condition to overwork and worry. Auscultation showed his vital organs to be sound; analysis of his blood demonstrated its purity. Therefore, he deduced, his body was well and his soul ill; and the soul —whose maladies are shameful and blameworthy—must be cured at all costs. He told a physician his plans: "I'll give to my body that is well the direction over my soul that is ill, wherefore I'll lead a military life that is almost entirely physical and in which the soul will recuperate."

His listener, who considered these distinctions between body and soul antiquated, shook his head in such a manner that Filippo blushed slightly, but without allowing himself to be dissuaded.

The open air, fatigue, the renunciation of his free will, the freedom from pecuniary worriment and the cares of a career, would bring back his freshness and spontaneity. The war that was to prove the healing of the world would be his medicine, too.

No, death was far away. On the other hand his health,

perhaps, even certainly, was near. Upon deeper reflection he found that he had never really believed that he would die in his youth, and whenever this fear had assailed him he had dispelled it with a glance at the palm of his left hand, where the life line was a deep, ruddy groove. He would go through the war, likewise, unharmed. There were too many things awaiting fulfillment in his life, and he would not be permitted to die before attaining his goal. What things to fulfill? What reward was to ripen in the autumn, with the war over, for his spirit reawakened by the brave experience? Love? Fortune? Inner harmony? There passed before his closed eyes, which he averted inwardly out of repugnance, the women of his fleeting adventures, whom he had approached with arid temples and breath held in, as when one drinks foul water when the road offers nothing better. He thought of the Taramanna girls, virile, indefatigable, all shrilling together, with that prolonged laughter of theirs which tinkled like a string of bells; and of Eugenia Berti, with that neutral white complexion reminiscent of the communion wafer, as straight as a pre-Raphaelite virgin reconciling sleep with death. Mary Corelli alone appealed to him and seemed entirely a woman, but rumour paired her with Federico; moreover, she was too rich for his hopes to venture near her.

"It would be absurd," he concluded, "for me to expect love and fortune at a single stroke. Everything I own I have won bit by bit with the sweat of my brow. The winners of the grand prize in the lottery aren't made of my stuff."

The vineyard of his feelings, his friendships, his love affairs, seemed devastated by a plague of phylloxera. There was not a single affection in him, not even that for his mother, which did not suffer from a hidden malady. His friendships had burgeoned forth smiling and flourishing; then, of a sudden, for reasons unknown to him, they withered, leaving behind a bare, wrinkled, twisted stalk. At times his breath came short as if beneath some invisible pneumatic bell, at the thought that he was incapable of loving or of being loved. Yet he did not lose faith in his destiny and in what his men and women friends, his neighbours and strangers, called his talent. If everything

else failed him, there remained that golden reserve, and he sought its glitter, looking in the mirror at his deep, sparkling eyes with the joy of the tremulous miser who beholds his hoard intact. He might doubt everything else when he subjected it to critical scrutiny; every other hope might waver. But this stood four-square to the winds. Without a doubt he was made of better stuff than the rest, and if he had merely wanted it in all seriousness, he could have excelled in the forum, and soon enough in Parliament. Why? The question had rarely occurred to him. But this evening it popped up suddenly; and it remained with him, in that silence vibrant with rasping noises, during the half hour that the train stopped over at Florence and he sat without stirring, the light turned off and the curtains drawn so as to discourage any traveller that happened along. All this time he harboured the question without offering reply.

"Why?" he asked himself, with his subtly sadistic pleasure of hurting himself, "why do I imagine that I'm better than the rest and that my lot is a privileged one? Suppose this were merely a superstition of mine? And first of all, what would talent be worth, or even genius, if I don't know my faith and my heart? Perhaps this unique, proud certainty is nothing but the mirage of the void, and I'm a mediocrity with a little gift of the gab, a dry logic, and an overheated imagination."

Thus he conversed with himself, incredulous of his own incredulity; and he was not aware that the train was again rustling along through the dark humidity of the new moon. He noticed it later when, asking himself the cause of the conciliatory peace in which he was lulled—he had not yet answered the question as to his being—he found it in the sweet solitude and the soft refuge of the journey. Now the Apennine stations beckoned to him with fairy lights, called out by voices that sounded like distant echoes of sleep.

"Very well, so be it!" he said, as if pronouncing the words aloud, standing before the window that opened upon the tepid darkness. "Even if I'm only an average man, the war increases my stature. By a voluntary act I have renounced my

will in favour of the State, and in return the State multiplies me, incarnating in my humble self a solemn decision of history and making me a participant in the majesty of the times."

Military music, kept in time with by the rolling of the train, blared in his imagination like an accompaniment to this outburst of oratory, whipping his blood with the voluptuousness of the martial parade. Love of country, which had been a passion in his adolescence that thronged with Roman and Napoleonic memories, and which had afterward strengthened into an intellectual conviction, now grew sensual as the train clambered up the shoulder of the Apennines, as florid as that of a semi-nude goddess. The war, save that single moment of stunned terror during that last July twilight in Villa Rustica, appeared to him ever more fascinating in its divine necessity and its purifying splendour. Once again he projected himself into the crepuscular gloom that filled the valley as with a motionless liquid, and felt his soul merge into it. The thought of the war sent him to sleep consoled.

When he awoke, as they were crossing the bridge over the lagoon, he was no longer alone. Another artillery sub-lieutenant was seated opposite him, busy putting his travelling-case in order after having sprinkled himself with cologne water; then he arose to brush his fine hair before the tiny mirror of the compartment. With finicky hands he adjusted the knot of his cravat, pulled out his trousers until they bloomed like paradoxical convolvuluses from the rigid stalks of his black leggings. Filippo opened his eyes just wide enough to be able to observe the man's movements, concealing his awakening behind a desire to hear the name and the voice of his travelling-companion and to address him familiarly. He was happy to read the number eight upon the cap of the other man, who, now having completed his toilette, adjusted it upon his head with the delicate finishing touches of a dainty miss; for this difference in regiment seemed to promise him a wide separation of their lots. But it was impossible to postpone the ceremony of introduction any longer. Filippo jumped to his feet with military precision, and said:

"Rubè."

"Garlandi. Third?"

"Eighth?"

"You slept like a log. You didn't stir even when the guard came around; I told him to respect the slumber of a warrior, and that I'd answer for your ticket."

"Thanks. How do you come to have so light and straight a sabre? Isn't it against the rules?"

The other man laughed but did not reply. Together they got off at Venice, and Filippo unwittingly gave him the right hand and stepped half a pace backward as if Garlandi were his superior. He felt a hateful admiration of the man's easy ways. On the steamer he asked him:

"Have you been in the service long?"

"Too long. Twenty-four hours up to this moment. Why? Did I strike you as a regular?"

They laughed. At the island where was situated the Headquarters to which they must first present themselves, Garlandi clanked his spurs elegantly, and, having heard his destination, disappeared, saluting his travelling-companion with a "well, good-bye" upon the edge of his lips.

Filippo stepped forward with his characteristic guilty hesitancy, and the adjutant said to him:

"Ah! Rubè? You've entered a special request."

Intimidated, he was about to frame a denial or some excuse, but he was too late.

"You wish to go with Major Berti. Very well. Proceed to Novesa, and present yourself to the second section of the heavy field artillery at Fort St. Andrea. This evening. . . . To-morrow."

But Filippo left on the first train, for at Venice, among the palaces that seemed crumbling amid the stagnant waters and the streets as dark as the corridors of a prison, he felt his spirits waver anew, and the sight of the gondolas as black as coffins unnerved him. At Novesa and St. Andrea, on the other hand, the marshes were abloom with water-lilies, and the tram ringing its bell amid the plane-trees banished all sinister thoughts.

He was too late to find Major Berti at St. Andrea, for the

officer had left before dusk. He came across him upon the threshold of the Albergo Centrale of Novesa.

"Ah, there, lieutenant! You kept your promise. Yes, I know, we have the honour of counting you among our officers. I put in a word for you. There's no reason for separating men in war who have been companions in peace. Eugenia? She's fine. She'll be here shortly to keep me company. Oh, yes, there's plenty of time before we proceed to the front. Our section exists on paper, but we need cannons, munitions, and drilling. And then we need the war, too. Are you sure there'll be a war? I'm not."

Filippo inquired what would happen if, while the section was getting ready, the Austrians should descend upon them and invade the Venetian plain.

"Why, then we'd be cooked. Wouldn't we? When you're at a ball, you dance. We'd answer with our picturesque bronze 87's. But rest easy on that score."

Filippo, however, had no desire to rest easy. And remorsefully aware that this postponement of hostilities was not at all to his taste, with this section that wasn't yet formed and the Austrians that were slow in descending upon them, he asked whether there wasn't some way in which he could be sent sooner to the front.

"Whew! What a hurry you're in! My dear lieutenant, the salvation of the country doesn't depend upon you or me. We all do what we can. We collaborate. We stand at our posts, ready for anything. Come, have lunch with me. There are strawberries."

Long, solemn days followed, each bringing new difficulties for Filippo to overcome,—the baking, feverish sun, the twilight prolonged into the very heart of night, the stuffy odour of warmed-over sauce and the unpalatable food that was gulped down in the company of his noisy messmates, the siestas in which the images of the evening before floated about as in a viscous puddle. He tried his best to be as industrious as a beginner in the cannon instruction, but the precise mathematical formulæ glided through his distracted mind. At times he was comforted by the gratitude of his students, to

whom, upon a meadow, he explained the paragraphs of the disciplinary regulations, succeeding from time to time in lighting in their remote eyes a gleam of understanding similar to the ineffectual flash of a match scratched against a wet box. But he knew that his love for the people was an acquired feeling, lacking all spontaneousness; he felt that his meticulous deference to his superiors was not exempt from calculation and petty aims, and that the joy with which he played thirty-three with Major Berti of an evening was feigned.

Above all it irked him to pretend familiarity with his brother officers, whom he regularly addressed with the intimate pronoun, and with whom, during the two long daily siestas, he exchanged idle gossip and smutty tales in the café on the square. Whenever possible, he slunk away so that he might be alone. Nor did they seek him over much. They were different, unconcerned with passionate political discourses, incurious, at least apparently, as to what was about to happen. They read the papers superficially, quite content in this long wait that was so free of responsibility and seemed for all the world like a vacation. They all appeared to him of Garlandi's type: adapted to life, as he defined them to himself. Whenever it was really indispensable, they saluted their superiors curtly, and they did not strain their eyes looking into the crowd for chevrons to which to render homage; nor did they trip over the sabres between their legs, nor gash their boots with their spurs. They easily learned the use of the goniometer, or else gave no thought to it. Many had already found their haven among the women of Novesa.

He, however, still found it difficult, after two weeks, to keep his balance on the bicycle, and there were times when he caught his wheel in a car track. Weakened by his dissatisfaction, by the drowsy, swampy atmosphere, he had already reduced his room at the inn to a worse state than his room in Rome; red and grey military instruction books were heaped up on the bureau, together with letters from Rome and Calinni that had been left unopened through fear that they might contain reproaches for his slothful silence. Of all his comrades, the one he found most to his liking was his orderly, a gardener

from Oderzo named Trevisan. His sharp, yellowish eyes sparkled with an innocent rascality free of irony, and his drawling, docile speech seemed fashioned expressly for asking and granting. Between these two there soon sprang up an alliance with agreements so precise that they might have been drawn up in documentary form. Rubè delivered no patriotic speeches to Trevisan, and Trevisan never broached to Rubè his utter lack of ambition to follow him in case the sub-lieutenant should be seized with a longing to go to the front. Rubè assented, with lowered lashes, when his orderly twice per week wished to disappear and sleep with his wife, and Trevisan walked on tiptoe in the ante-room so as not to disturb the lieutenant's sleep during the sultry hours. He would place back into position the handle-bars of the bicycle (which daily returned in bad shape), with an impassible countenance, upon which not even the most suspicious could have discovered a trace of sarcasm. Toward evening, if he succeeded in eluding his inexorable companions, Filippo would go for a stroll upon the verdant bastions of the fort, recalling the silent past, embroidering fancies upon the enigmatic future. Then he felt entirely alone and entirely himself, though his sabre and his regimentals weighed upon him like a pack. A fleeting happiness would quiver in his nostrils when the evening breeze floated across the landscape, which lay soft amid the belfries that seemed to rise from the lake.

Rome seemed forever lost in the past, and the war, though imminent, appeared absurd. Thus he sank into endless habits, dignifying his indolence with sadness; and the leafy, straight path that he daily traversed had no outlets. The days repeated one another, the hours replaced one another. But he was startled when it seemed that the partisans of peace would suddenly prevail in parliament and that Italy would turn about face. The men in green-grey uniform were all agog in Novesa, as when a danger or rare sight is announced from the bridge of a steamer in mid-ocean. Many who knew each other only from daily saluting paused in troops upon the square; clamorous conversations inundated the café; and the disguised hopes of all who saw the danger disappearing, the

trembling impatience of those who yearned for sacrifice, the perturbation of others whom the change of course would compel to reunite the threads of their difficult existence, merged into one vast confusion. This time Filippo remembered that he had important friends at Rome, and he telegraphed a message of bitter doubt to Taramanna. He was reassured with the reply: "Crisis being solved according to our ideals."

One night he awoke with a start as if some one had banged at his door crying "Forward!" out of a bitter mouth. But nobody entered. The noise came from the pavement of the square, from a cart. No, not one cart. There were two, four, five motor lorries rumbling certainly on their way to the front. It was pitch dark, and he imagined the mute, erect men squeezed into the narrow, rectangular space of every wagon, one beside the other, grey amid the quivering gloom, suddenly illuminated by the red shaft of light from a lantern on the square, as by a blade that gored them one after the other. At first he tried to grow enthusiastic. He saw them in their stupendous advance toward the dawn of the mountains where soon the violet-hued wind would be blowing across the wheat blossoms. Each had his mind set like a prow toward the east. Indeed, they themselves were waking the wind of dawn, shaking the very darkness with their puissant procession! Almost, almost he had strength enough to bound from his bed, dress in great haste, lacing with the skilful speed that he envied in his colleagues, the puttees under his knees, to throw the window wide open and let a gush of cool darkness besprinkle the black room that was close with his warm breath. He beheld another self close the door, heard his spurs go clanking down the stairs, saw him stand at the edge of the platform shouting to the chauffeur of the first truck that thundered by, with a laughterless joy: "Hey, there! Is there room for me, too?"

But the torpor of his blood, which flowed tepid in his legs, kept him upon his bed, where he had raised himself to sitting posture. Recalled to himself by the soft consciousness of his flesh, he wished for silence. He entrusted himself

superstitiously to the ticking of the watch placed upon the commode; it seemed an intimate, propitious sound; he wished to hear it, second by second, numbering the ticks in a half voice as if that weak pulsation could drown out the thunder of the wagons rolling across the square. And yet; and yet. The tiny watch had conquered the infernal rumbling. There was an end to everything, and now there had come to an end that strident stream of horseless wagons that was galloping toward the mountains, to which they were drawn as to horrible calamities. The last one had rolled by. He pictured to himself the endless succession, perhaps from the Udine to the straight road of Mareno, like a mourning ribbon worn across the dark garb of night, beneath rayless stars. At Novesa came silence, in which sank softly the quiver—now almost indistinct—of the last wheels. And this silence was as vast and consoling as a sacred chant. But no,—it was not finished! The entrance of another lorry into the square after this pause was as rending as a shriek. Then another, and another and another, innumerable, launched upon a mad career, as if each would dash in pursuit of the preceding one, and make a bloody broth of the men who sat there armed, aloft as if upon a military carriage.

Now the house shook with the metallic procession, and the porcelain pitcher, invisible in the dark, danced at intervals in the basin.

He arose, breathing laboriously; he did not care to turn on the light; he groped about the room, guiding himself with his palm flattened against the wall, as if to sustain it against the shock that seemed to shatter it. With his eyes distended in the void he beheld horrible things: the earthquake, the funereal carts of the pestilence with the *monatti* on them, shining rows of teeth smiling a great, grim, deathly smile, thousands of lorries proceeding to a summit over which they were dashed with their clinging human burden and their wheels still turning, into a bottomless chasm. He turned back to bed with a shudder that was very like to a groan.

Then, with his fists clenched, he invoked a slumber as devastating as death. But an hour later he was reawakened by

the tolling of the church bell; it rang sharply above the routine intermingling of the morning crowd, indefatigable, chiming lustily after brief pauses, as useless as if invoking impossible aid amidst the certainty of shipwreck.

Thus came the war. A few days before the outbreak Eugenia Berti arrived from Rome. He found her on the square with her father, who approached him leading her from behind and introducing her jestingly.

"Here is our Valkyrie. Here is the Amazon. She brings us war."

She was dressed in white with two white wings upon her blond head, and her face seemed transparent in the full light of the Venetian spring. She brought him no news of Federico nor of Mary, nor of his other friends, since he made no inquiries; she gave him her hand and said, simply:

"How are you? Well?"

Naturally, and without the suggestion of any previous agreement, they lunched together and then dined, and went together to the café. So, too, on the following days. On the fourth evening at the café the hubbub of the customers crowded around the iron tables was rent by the clear voice of one who, jumping to his feet, cried out:

"The airplane."

Everybody got up and gazed toward the sky, whence came the drone of a huge bird and a flash as if from fireworks. The bluish obscurity that lay over the plain was for a few moments punctuated by the chatter of the machine guns. Two bombs and several shots fell with an echoless splash through a padded atmosphere.

Many had left the scene. Those who remained resumed their conversation in hushed tones.

CHAPTER III

EUGENIA had suffered a slight palpitation, but not without the pleasure of satisfied curiosity. In the villina of Rocco di Papa, when in September the thunders of the mountain rolled down to the sea, she would run to draw the curtains and close the windows, and in fright would stuff her fingers into her ears; for since her childhood she had retained the memory of a shepherd that she saw struck by lightning in the midst of a tempest. The cannonading, on the other hand, had not unnerved her, or, at most, had slightly quickened her breathing, and made her nostrils quiver up and down as when a phial of salts is sniffed at some distance.

They all stopped at the same inn, which in a short time was to become a hospital. Nobody any longer swept its corridors; the bells rang wildly in the morning as if their ringing could multiply the two remaining waiters; and if one wished to change the towels, which were soiled with soap and powder, it was necessary to see the proprietor in person. The strangers, all of them officers, with a few gentlemen, lived there as one lives in a house where one has already given notice of removal, amidst the packed luggage. Filippo did not know where he would find a place. The Bertis, father and daughter, were looking for lodgings in a villa, for he never seemed to think that he would be dislodged with the slightest notice, and wherever he arrived he at once sank roots, ready to let himself be rooted up without resistance or agreement. Four years before he had been transferred from Alessandria to Rome, and had at once bought a cottage at Tufo di Rocca di Papa, and settled down there as if he had never breathed any other air. He had now been at Novesa for a few weeks, and he felt as much at home as if he had been born in the vicinity. Eugenia had always accompanied him. As to the war, she had made up her mind that she would be near him as long as

possible, and then she would try to have herself summoned to a Red Cross post near his destination.

These things and others she turned over in her mind as she gathered her honey-hued tresses over her neck and slowly prepared herself for the night. The miniature battle in the air was now forgotten, but that noise falling into her soul had traced, like a pebble cast into a lake, circles ever widening until they embraced all the years she had lived thus far. She had wished to be left alone. She had said good-night on the landing to Filippo, who roomed on the first floor. A strange fellow that man was, with his staring eyes, and on his too delicate temple a prominent artery that seemed fairly to throb beneath the onlooker's gaze! She had left her father at the door of his room, which adjoined her own, with the regular kiss that she received every evening upon her forehead. But the partition was so thin and transmissive that she could not help hearing from the other side every movement, even the most intimate, and she was too weary to stop her ears. The major, although he had not yet reached fifty, was already troubled with symptoms of age; he would rinse his mouth, let his boots drop to the floor one after the other, yawn to a tune before falling into sleep, and could be heard as plainly as if he were in the same room with his neighbours. But Eugenia, at twenty-four, and with her nun-like composure, still possessed certain childhood resources; and having extinguished the light, she could fall directly to sleep with a soft, noiseless respiration, banishing all reflections to the following day.

There was little to reflect upon. What had happened and was still happening in the Berti household was beyond remedy and was tinged with the melancholy of certain mediocre misfortunes lacking the proportions of a catastrophe, which belittle him who suffers them, constraining him to weeping that, beheld by an outsider, is as ugly as a grimace. Three years before, Eugenia's mother, a woman of forty, her formerly beautiful face smudged in cosmetics, her form encased in a corset that dammed her overflowing attractiveness, had been surprised by her husband in the act of closing valises and tightening straps around portmanteaus, when neither a pleas-

ure trip nor a removal was contemplated. She burst into sobs that were stifled by the stiffness of her stays, and cried:

"Ah! Filiberto! Filiberto! Patience! Forgive me! Kill me, but don't say anything to me. I'm going. I can't stand it any longer."

The poor man could hardly caution "Sh . . . sh . . ." so that the woman should weep and speak in lower tones, and the children, who were due to return from their tennis, should hear nothing. But she kept sighing convulsively, and between one sigh and the next she uttered the same words, while with her hands, where already the veins were beginning to stand out, she kept stuffing handkerchiefs and stockings into the empty spaces of a hat-box.

The best he could do was to have her postpone her departure to the next day, that she might manage to leave the house at a time when the children were out. He felt confident in his heart that this was a hysterical crisis and that night would bring wiser counsel. But Signora Giselda arose next morning as resolute as she had been on the evening before, and, though between tears and sighs, she diligently packed her baggage. It was impossible to elicit any explanation from her. She could stand it no longer; she could stand it no longer; this was all she could say. Then her husband, finding all attempts at persuasion vain, felt at last a momentary flood of anger well up in his bosom, and he turned it loose upon her, upbraiding her with his extended forefinger, declaring that she was robbing her children of their honour and their bread, and that she deserved to be shot. But she looked at him askance, incredulously. Without discontinuing her rummaging in the drawers, as one does in a hotel room to see whether anything has been forgotten, she replied dramatically: "Kill me, then."

To his children and his acquaintances Berti said that he had placed her in a sanatorium; and so often did he repeat his fiction that he finally came to believe it. She must have been crazy.

But everybody knew that Giselda had gone off to join a young man, who, up to a few days before the incident, had

been her husband's orderly. Then he had returned to a little Alpine inn, where he had served as cook and where now he would rule as owner, assuming proprietorship with the savings that had been in part furnished to him, and would now be completed, by his mistress.

Somebody recalled that she was the daughter of one of Florence's most popular pastry-cooks and that the native atmosphere of the shop would have been better suited to her than the air of the mountains. One day Eugenia received an envelope with a picture post-card enclosed. It was a photograph of Hotel Bellavista, with a line and a half of handwriting as fine as a spider's web: "Your poor mother, who did not do it on purpose."

At home the incident was never discussed, not even by sister and brother, for Marco, at the very first attempt made by Eugenia to focus the conversation upon that point, had turned the talk brusquely, and a few moments later turned his back as well. Instead, he would always revert to a project that he had let slip several times, undeterred even by his mother's presence. Unless one was a millionaire, his idea ran, there was little advantage in remaining in Italy; better be a cabin-boy than a lawyer; at eighteen a fellow ought to begin to get into life. No one paid any attention to him, until one day, with scarcely an "I forgot to tell you" casually brought up between courses at dinner, he told his father and his sister that he had been offered an editorial position upon the *Italiano d'America,* a New York fortnightly. And he really left the following week. That night his father, as he went to bed, repeated several times, scarcely pronouncing the words: "If I couldn't hold the mother, how could I expect to hold the son?"

And the exact logic of the question tranquillised him.

What most troubled Eugenia was the impossibility of venting her grief, for she felt it festering in her heart. The silence of all the others constrained her as if it connoted the reproach of contagion.

She often saw Federico Monti, to whom she had never spoken of love. Not even to herself did she confess openly the cer-

tainty of her love for him and the hope of being loved in return. But in this reticence there was more sureness than fear. She was not even aware of her feelings, as one in health is not aware of one's organs. Not even in her dreams did she speak to herself of him. Her love was like the riches of the wealthy person, who never thinks of them; it was like the love between happy children and their mothers, which takes and gives in a natural interchange and flows almost unaware.

They had never kissed each other, nor did they use the familiar pronoun in speech. Recently, a change had come about. When, during the long visits to the Rustica, with the other visitors left on the veranda of the villa, she would go for a stroll with Federico, she no longer felt the old security. Until she had got out of sight, she felt leashed by the gaze of Federico's mother,—a long, sharp, dark gaze almost possessed of weight. She felt embarrassed by it, as by a bramble in which her dress had been caught. And she lengthened her stride, but felt that the gaze behind her was lengthened to keep pace with her.

One day, in a clump of laurels, she said to him brusquely:

"Why don't you ever talk to me about my misfortune?"

He blushed, instead of her, and fumbled for a reply:

"What would be the use?"

"Your silence raises a barrier between us."

They resumed their stroll automatically.

"My mother," she began again, after a few moments that had seemed very long, "is unfortunate rather than guilty. Even since we children were tots, her day was crowded with a number of petty busy cares. She would go over our school work with us, she would mend our stockings. I assure you she was good and admirable. Then, when we had grown up, she was like one who has been thrown out of a position. She was so queer in these last years, always distracted and oppressed. Papa is a fine gentleman. But he did not understand her and could not cure her. Marco and I thought we were fulfilling all our filial duties because we walked on tiptoe whenever she had a headache. I cannot accuse her and I cannot

defend her. But you, by keeping silence with all the others, accuse her very harshly, and allow her misfortune to fall also upon me."

She had pronounced the final words in such agitation that she seemed ready to melt into tears. But Federico recongealed the tears as he replied without looking into her face:

"There are things about which it is very difficult to speak."

Immediately after, he had repented, and, taking her hands, continued:

"Why do you torment yourself so? What have you to do with your mother? It's a bad trait of yours to make everything worse. Everybody says that you're so good and so beautiful, but that always, even before your misfortune, you've had a moodiness that was an evil omen."

She did not wish to weep, and spiritedly withdrew her hand. They turned back to the veranda where the others were seated, and that was the last unaccompanied stroll they took. From that time on Federico's mother, who at once sensed the change in relations and knew that she no longer had anything to fear, became sincerely affectionate toward Eugenia and invited her often to lunch. Without blinking nor changing her demeanour, Eugenia saw Mary Corelli gradually supplant her.

Now, as before, she spent her leisure hours at the Rustica because she could not make new friends. At home she had her domestic duties, putting the house in order, looking to her father's laundry and his uniforms, and listening at table to his regimental anecdotes, which were always the same and which concluded with one of those guffaws that seemed manufactured in quantities.

When he came back to the house for lunch and his spurs were heard clinking on the stairs, Eugenia would bound up from her reading and dash into the kitchen to see to things and give orders. But this she did really to distract herself and drown out the cries of her heart. She feared to question herself and discover that she loved her father rather out of charity and duty than out of filial sympathy.

Now that the war had broken out, a new thorn had been added to the old. How long it was since Marco had answered

their letters! Was there a danger that the youth, the son of an officer in active service, should remain recalcitrant in America, and that this additional shame should humiliate the family?

This subject, like all the serious, painful domestic questions, was not broached between father and daughter. They discussed the domestic budget, gastronomic recipes, service orders, and pleasant reading. But they felt between them something in common, like two shameful beggars knocking at the same door, when every noon Major Berti would ask, with studied indifference: "Any mail?"—and Eugenia would reply, with similar casualness: "Nothing, papa." Then their glances would wander in pretended interest to the most insignificant objects in the room,—anywhere rather than meet each other.

All these memories would well up in her heart almost every evening as she heard the indiscreet noises of her father before he fell asleep. Often he snored, and even this soughing, lending a gloomy voice to the darkness, pained the daughter. But it was vain to recall these thoughts, knowing that she had no power over what had happened or what was about to happen. Not even in prayer, to which from time to time she resorted, could she find solace. Leaning over the past, bending toward the future, she could feel herself grow pale within, like one who peers into the bottom of a well in search of one's own reflection. Wherefore, as soon as she could, she merged memory into sleep, commending herself to the light of morning, which would bring serenity. Then came morning, almost always beneficent, and in the freshness of her voice, in the confident press of her ever new duties, she would hide the sadness of the night before.

The morning of May 25th, after the first battle above the distant belfries, dawned as festive as any other over the square of Novesa, with a permeating odour of dew and a petulant competition between the bell of the church and the bells of the trams. Major Berti was standing on the threshold of the inn with his hands in his pockets and his eyes lost behind the oblique darting of the swallows, when there passed before

him, clicking his heels together for an instant in salute, sub-lieutenant Rubè. He called Rubè back and clasped his hand.

"Eh, lieutenant! What's the rush? Where are you bound this early hour? Have you had your coffee?"

"I'm going to have it at the fort, where it's a little better. Yesterday I left some open accounts at the canteen, and I want to get there quickly and settle them. I trust the marshal all right, but I trust myself better."

"What a zealous officer!" smiled Berti, still holding his hand, and not feeling that it vibrated with impatience to let go. "If everybody were as brave as you, the war would never have broken out. By the way, did you sleep well last night?"

"I? Yes. Not bad quarters."

"But what a racket, eh, yesterday evening? Enough to make one tremble."

He rolled his r's.

Filippo gulped down his saliva, and said:

"Yes. It sounded like the fireworks at a patron saint's celebration."

Then Berti laughed and allowed him to go on his way. But Filippo saw one tram after the other pass by, and did not dare to mount it. He made a forced march on foot the entire length of the road, so that he should have no company, and that he might listen to the two alternating queries that stretched along his soul like the two rows of plane-trees which accompanied the path right down to the swamp. Had Major Berti spoken seriously of trembling? Had he really been perturbed by that first aerial skirmish, and was he simply confessing a sensation of anguished stupor, without caring if others should dishonour it with the name of fear? Or had he pretended to be talking of himself, while in reality he had been valiant and undisturbed, only to peer into the soul of others? The one query struck against the other and rebounded without answer. It seemed to him equally improbable that this man should be so humble or so cruel. To say to the first comer, under no necessity at all, and with a sort of descriptive satisfaction: "Do you know, I trembled last night when I heard the cannons?"—was worthy either of a saint or of some spirit-

less lackwit, not of an artillery major. But to say to another: "Do you know, I watched you last night from the corner of my eye when we came back to the inn, and I understood" —this required a sharpness and an offensive spirit for which there was really no place in the tight, sound heart—a regulation heart—of Filiberto Berti. After all, what was this talk about trembling? A mere manner of speaking, as if to say that there had been a racket? This hypothesis vexed him more than any other. Was there, then, a man,—were there many of them,—who arose on the 25th of May as they had arisen on the 24th,—the very same, unchanged, recalling the first scene of the war as one recalls a heavy shower or a mob? Was he the only frightened wretch?

The night before, at the muffled reverberation of the explosions, he had felt his pulse accelerate a bit, perhaps no more or less than had occurred to any number of others. But then, as he took his way silently to the inn, that shallow emotion had been merged in his recollections with the dismaying vision which he had beheld on the night of the 31st July, at the Rustica, and with that other, more troubled one, which had overtaken him on the night the ammunition wagons had rumbled by; and gradually, gradually as he explored it, the emotion assumed inordinate proportions. At first he told himself that it was pity for his country at war, for the blood that was about to flow; and he was able to doze off. But toward the middle of the night he suddenly awoke in the fierce conviction that he had been afraid. Suffocated by shameful desperation, he feared that he would shriek this out; he got up; he dressed himself; hundreds of times he measured the narrow length and breadth of the room, with the soul of a prisoner condemned to death. In fact, it seemed to him that if his superiors had been able to read his heart, they would have had him placed against a wall and shot by a firing squad. He hoped that the morning sun would dissipate his nightmare, and instead, here in the morning sun was Major Berti saying to him: "—enough to make one tremble!"—Then it was true. He had really trembled, on account of a few distant, harmless shots, discharged between the sky and the indifferent

waters,—he, Filippo Rubè, with his interventionist speeches, with his heroic departure, with his sabre at his side. A cowardly wretch! His shadow, which followed him along the road, with the foppery and the decorations of his military uniform, seemed to him a thing of irony. If any one at all,—the humblest of men, the most degraded, any scamp, any shirker,—had come along and said to him, "Rubè, I, too, was afraid!" he believed that he, Rubè, would have fallen at the man's feet, and wept as before a saviour.

He recalled that as he was about to enter the precincts of the fort, he had held his foot suspended for a second as one who does not dare to plunge into a cold bath. He scrutinised closely the sentinel at the entrance and all the soldiers he encountered, inferiors and equals alike, with the precise purpose of unmasking any traces left upon their faces by the emotion of the previous night. But none was visible. In the dingy café the officers were pouring their regular nip of brandy into their cups of chicory, vieing with one another amidst raucous discords of laughter in their accustomed licentious compliments to Carolina, the fetching daughter of the proprietor. Here and there they were speaking, too, of the aerial incursion, as of so many other things, and above all so that the better informed might have an opportunity to display what they knew about the transporting capacity of the airplanes and the power of the new explosives. The question which Filippo nonchalantly dropped like a used match—how many dead and wounded, how many buildings shattered? —was met with hasty replies. One said a single casualty, another said three dead. A single house had been struck. But it was an old, ramshackle affair, anyway.

That they were all heroes or all insentient brutes he could not believe. They were comedians, that was it; actors like himself, who smiled to this lieutenant and that, and shoutingly sent to prison the soldiers who had been caught working in their off-duty shoes, while within him he felt his soul fall to pieces like a thing rotten at the core.

Upon a terrace, amidst four cannons that were squatting like watchdogs, he was approached by Trevisan, his orderly.

When the man came within a few paces, he no longer dared to continue in a straight line, and began to wobble like a skiff dancing on a slight swell. He perspired, and could barely separate his words, which seemed glued to his palate.

"Lieutenant. . . ."

"Speak, damn it!" roared Filippo, summoning the authoritative voice that he used upon great occasions.

Then his face grew paler and more sinister than ever, the colour of tilled earth.

"Lieutenant, last night . . ."

"Were you scared? Speak! Coward!"

"No, sir."

Filippo gave a shudder, as if the thread, upon which for a moment he had been suspended, had snapped.

"No, sir. Last night the lieutenant gave me permission to go home. I had the misfortune to lose the last tram. It left right before my nose, and I slept in the barracks. If the lieutenant would kindly grant me permission this evening . . ."

"Go on home, go to your wife, go to the devil, go wherever you please, get out of my way!"

The orderly went off wobbling just as he had approached, still facing Rubè, and every moment raising his hand to his forehead in token of gratitude and in salute, but without any curiosity as to why lieutenant Rubè, with that hollow countenance in which his eyes seemed phosphorescent, should lunge forward as if about to leap. But Rubè was a prey to anger, like a hardened clod invaded by an unexpected flood of water that opens it at every pore. To get out of himself! To merge with all external things! In the two hours of duty that remained to him, he was omnipresent, impetuous, infallible in ferreting out the slightest negligence on the part of his subordinates, inexorable, for the first time, in reprimanding and in punishing. At noon he jumped upon a bicycle and covered the road at high speed, enjoying with effort the cloud of dazzling dust that surrounded him and the sweat which, soaking into his linen, came through and ran in big rills down his uniform. The room at the inn was peopled with cool transparencies, with the windows open and the cur-

tains drawn where the sunlight climbed in. There was in it an acrid breath of somewhat withered magnolia. Filippo undressed hurriedly and got under the covers, which the sirocco, tamed and rendered almost visible in the half shadows, bellied like a sail. Amidst a great rumbling in his ears, which echoed like shells, he heard the first bell that called the lodgers to breakfast, and felt the delight of one who hears reveille and has already decided to go to sleep again. He repeated a single word: "fever, fever," and he felt fever coming on, he invoked it, he foretasted it, as an absolution and a remedy. At the sound of the second bell it seemed to him that he was in a wreck, descending spirally into the echoing darkness of slumber.

Berti and his daughter waited at table for him a few minutes, thinking that he might be a trifle tardy. Then they put their spoons into their soup. Berti said:

"He must have gone to the Luna to eat with his associates."

"That has happened only once, and he gave us notice before-hand."

The very morning previous, Eugenia had received a letter from Federico in which, among other things, he had written: "Don't let Filippo Rubè out of your sight. During the recent months that he spent at Rome he seemed to me upset in both spirit and body. He may need a perspicacious, delicate friendship such as yours."

Later she succeeded in getting an attendant to make inquiries, and she learned that he was in bed and was not well. Then, when her father had got up from his siesta to return to the headquarters, she asked his permission to begin her work as nurse by visiting the lieutenant, who perhaps was ill, without friends or attention, in a tumble-down inn where even neatness was lacking. She knocked twice hesitantly at the door.

"Come in!" invited a voice which she could not recognise, and which some inert irritation, mingled with feeble dismay, had divested of all timbre, emptying it, as the voice of one groaning beneath debris.

She took a step forward, closing the door behind her, and

was suddenly enwrapped by the shadow in which her hair changed colour. Although it was only five o'clock of a very long day, the room, which faced toward the west, was already enveloped in dusk, and the air, saturated with pollen, filtered through the dark shutters and acquired the acidity of unevaporated perspiration. The garments heaped upon a chair could scarcely be distinguished, and the shadows sent back by the mirror were a trifle lugubrious.

Filippo raised his head, supporting it upon his clasped hands, and sought out his visitor, who still remained standing near the doorway.

"You? Signorina Berti?"

"I. Am I disturbing?"—She rebelled at that unexpected formal *you*. "Papa sent me to see how you were. We feared that you might not be well."

"Yes, that's so. I forgot to notify headquarters. That's an infraction. But I couldn't help myself, I fell asleep as if I were felled. I'll write a note now asking to be excused. I'll request a doctor to come and see that I'm ill."

Eugenia shook her head until it seemed that her golden tresses would tinkle, and tried to laugh.

"I'm not wearing an edged cap, am I? I haven't come on a visit of inspection."

He said nothing.

"Do you really feel ill? Still? You know that we're good friends of yours and you may count on us."

She advanced imperceptibly toward the bed. But suddenly she changed her mind.

"A little air? Some light?"

And she went over to the window that was farther from the bed.

"No, no!" objected Filippo in a half voice. But his objection came too late. Eugenia had already opened the window. A flock of swallows with a strident shrieking changed direction as if a trap had opened beneath them. From the pillow only the sky could be seen, but the odour of the watered square rose to the room, and the glad noises could be heard. Filippo asked:

"Has it been raining?"

"Raining?" she repeated, turning and smiling in amazement. "The sky is absolutely cloudless, and only the moon is missing. It will be a great night for aerial attacks. Everybody's afraid that the Austrians will come back to-night."

"Afraid!" said Filippo, somewhat too loudly, stretching forward on the bed almost half his length. "Ridiculous fear. When all's said and done, a couple of airplanes like yesterday's arrive and demolish a shanty and kill two or three persons in a zone inhabited by some three or four hundred thousand. After all, it's easier to win the grand prize in the lottery than to be struck by a chip from a bomb."

He was too excited. He spoke grandiloquently as if under the necessity of convincing a crowd. His face was wan and his forehead pale. With his left hand he grasped his shirt, so that it should not open and expose his chest; his right he waved about wildly as he spoke.

"It's only a more colourful sort of storm. It would be the same as to fear a storm. Nobody's afraid of a storm."

"I," said Eugenia, measuring her words serenely, "am so afraid of lightning."

"You're a woman and may say so."

He threw himself back. Now she could see fully his utter abasement, and she drew close to the head of the bed.

"It's true," he repeated, in a stifled voice, feeling security in her nearness.

"Fear has nothing to do with logic or calculation. Nor even with dread. One may even desire death and yet fear it. There's nothing the matter with me. I don't believe I even have fever. It was this cursed Venetian sun that makes your blood sizzle. A passing weakness. I'd like to be sent as soon as possible to the Carnia front, where you can breathe cool air. But last night I suffered, and you realised it."

As he was staring straight ahead, he did not see her shake her head in denial.

"I suffered right through the night. I had the nightmare of a fellow who must go forward and yet hasn't a bit of strength;

he can't even get sick or swoon. Then a firing squad, and bang! I'm not afraid of death. But such a death! Yet in a real battle it could never come about so. There must at such times be an inner cry that impels one forward. One must scent an odour of fury. You strike, you're struck; there's defiance, rage. But these aerial raids are horrible. It isn't the danger, it's the horror. They're like robbers who shatter the gates of heaven. You are so unprepared, your spirits are so well-tempered and at ease, when down from above comes a flash with the authority of a supreme punishment. I know why people fight and suffer, but it makes me shudder to think of those poor fellows who feel their blood run cold and their nerves go to ruin, without any notion of what it's all about. It's horrible."

He fairly shouted the last word.

"You," said Eugenia, "are brave and compassionate. But you're feverish."

She placed her hand upon his forehead, which was cold and agitated. He grasped her bare wrist under the sleeve of her white waist.

"I," he answered, in a voice that broke into a wheeze, "I'm not brave. Perhaps I'm a coward. And as for compassion, I don't even pity myself."

He turned his face away, still holding the woman's wrist, and wept with a noiseless weeping.

Thus they remained until the night just outside the open window flowed into the room like a bluish wave. Then she freed herself and said:

"I must be going now. I'll come back. . . . It'll pass. Sleep, sleep."

He followed her with his glance until she reached the door. She already had her hand upon the knob, when Filippo, summoning all his strength to his lips, with his hand outstretched, managed to say:

"Don't mention a word to anybody. Not a soul. I beg you."

With a gesture of assent, which was also one of salute,

Eugenia went out. He was left in a quivering anguish, out of which from time to time rose the images of Calinni and of his mother, whom for so many days he had forgotten.

A half hour might have gone by, when some one entered, and having turned on the light, placed in his hand a sealed letter. He clutched it in terror, imagining for an instant some unlikely message from the military authorities.

It was a violet note. It read: "Dear friend. You have told me nothing. And whatever you might have said would have been confided to a sisterly heart. E."

"Wretch, you cowardly wretch!" he said to himself in a low voice, seeking his reflection in the mirror that hung upon the opposite wall.

Then he lay down flat, with the letter in his clenched fist.

CHAPTER IV

By the time June had come the inn, with the last lodgers dismissed, became saturated with the odour of chloroform and fresh plastering, and crossed itself with a large cross upon the roof. The Bertis had found a villa upon the Vallesella road,—a low, red structure, squatting amidst a shaded garden, which in the other direction faced a few cloud-coloured willows on the edge of a canal. There was also a gravel path, where a peacock was strutting back and forth excitedly, as if committing a speech to memory.

When they saw that Filippo had come to the last day before moving without having sought or found a lodging, they offered him a room, though they foresaw with a certain anxiety —especially Eugenia—that the tongues of the other officers would wag. He was content with the faithful, protective company of the major, though it was a bit boresome, with the airy moisture that cooled the villa and with the quiet, antique furnishings that invited to peaceful thoughts. But his evil conscience kept rising like refuse to the surface of a swamp, and whatever in him was most petty came to trouble his mind. Thus, at first, he imagined that he had discovered the primary cause of his dissatisfaction in the certainty of being so near to Eugenia, almost as if keeping a close watch upon her who held his sad secret. On the morrow of that impulsive confession he had arisen, though weak and broken in every joint, returning to his regular duties almost in the illusion of having annulled the reality of the previous day. Then he had sought out Eugenia more assiduously than before, as if every moment she should say to him: "You know, I don't believe a word you said; you were delirious." Or, holding his hand tightly in her soft, tender palm: "Rest easy. I'll not breathe a word to a living soul." She, however, naturally kept silence, and spoke to him almost exclusively about his health.

Filippo was more than intelligent enough to understand the

delicacy of that reticence; but his unbridled imagination shot through things like a flash of dazzling rays, corrupting his intelligence with a poisoned breath. Thus, though he felt himself sliding into a whirlwind of untruth, he would catch himself picturing a sardonic, scornful Eugenia who had betrayed his secret to her father and had also written to Federico about it, so that all Rome buzzed with the tale. Then he recalled previous cases in his life when he had given proof of courage, and constructing a harangue according to all the rules, he persuaded himself that he had never been a coward and that he had, through excessively scrupulous introspection, mistaken a palpitation, which on the battlefield would have been the herald of a glorious charge, for the poltroonery that besmirches the wretch in the slime. But now the imminence of a threatening moonlit night threw him back upon the obsession that again seemed to him the truth and emptied his veins.

Once, finding Eugenia paler than usual, he asked himself whether she were not seriously ill, and he caught himself thinking the basest of thoughts. "If she were to die, the only person that knows my shame would disappear." He immediately ran for shelter in quest of purer thoughts. But like the pursued robber who turns a corner and finds other officers at the end of the street through which he hoped to effect his escape, he recognised the countenance of his conscience in the mirror of another no less odious thought. "Well," he told himself, "in order to be sure of her I ought to possess a secret of hers that would be as great as mine; I ought, for example, to make her my mistress." Rendered desperate by this relapsing into inconfessible notions, he dropped his spoon into the porringer. (They were all three at table, on one of the last nights at the inn.)

"What are you thinking of, Rubè?" asked Eugenia, in a voice that seemed to him to issue from his own breast. And only then did he awake with a long shudder.

Even at the villa they continued to address themselves with the formal *lei* to which unhesitantly they had returned after the brief abandonment of that tearful dusk. Eugenia, whenever he entered, made a studied effort to greet him with the

simple cheer of a guest or a sister, but she avoided looking at him for very long, almost in fear lest her eyes should seem scrutinising. Filippo, on his side, tried hard now to be more familiar with her father than with her, and thus flattered himself betimes that he was excluding her from the circle of his own life; or else he assumed certain airs that deceived nobody at all. During the humid moonlit twilights they would have been seated only a few moments at supper when the voice of a belfry—watch out in the air!—would spread over the dormant landscape like the leaves of a poisonous flower. Then Eugenia would rise to draw the curtains, and Filippo, pressing his shoulders against the back of the chair and his feet upon the ground, so as not to feel the emptiness between his stomach and his knees, would speak faster and more heatedly of nothing at all, with an undercurrent of brave indifference for the warning that fell from aloft. But the half shadows of the room, before Eugenia returned to her place and turned on the electric light, were filled with that limpid glance of hers which he fled as from an inquisitor.

Twice, orally, he overstepped the mark in his defence. The first time was on a stormy night, when, breathing the air in deep draughts, and vibrating from his ears to his heart with that great thunderous music which brought recollections of the deep valleys of Calinni and promised him an evening of quiet nerves, free from all shocks of aerial alarms, he overstressed his jesting upon Eugenia's fright.

"Come out with me, signorina," he suggested. "These Venetian tempests are incomparably splendid. The clouds are shaped like crags and the opposing electrical sides cannonade each other with lightning bolts that are as long as the sweep of a bomb. There are flashes under the illumination of which the green of the plane-trees and the lindens assumes sulphureous reflections."

"You are a poet," replied Eugenia, perhaps without irony. "But I'm so afraid. And I'm thinking, too, of those poor chaps who will spend the night cramped in the mud of the trenches."

"Those poor chaps," retorted Filippo, averting his glance,

"will not complain. Rather the fires of heaven than the fires of earth."

"That's so, too. But I'm afraid, just the same, and I'm going to bed and stop my ears with the sheeting. I'm ashamed, see?" And she left with a smile that was simple and human, but in which Filippo thought he could read accusation and scorn.

The other time that he overdid his pretence was when he could not resist the temptation of asking news of Marco. The major began with knife and fork to mince the slices of fish that lay on his plate, and, without raising his eyes, minced his words as well:

"Oh, Marco. Nothing. That is . . . We've received a letter from him at last. A few days ago. He isn't any too well. He's making arrangements to get back to Italy and present himself. But you can't imagine how damned negligent they are in those consular offices. And the time it takes. Eh, there's time for everybody!"

Filippo saw through the lie and was silent. But he often entertained himself with thoughts of Marco. That distant youth, parted from Italy by so much water and so much land, that taciturn fellow whom he knew only by first and last name, had become a companion of his, an antagonist, an interlocutor, above all a point of reference to which he brought his thoughts and his actions in an attempt to behold them clearly. Who was the better? Marco Berti or he, Filippo Rubè? Was Marco right, who, feeling no vocation for war, listened from afar to this swirling flood, yet remained huddling in his hearth, lest he might be drawn in—or he, who, though he felt that he was part and parcel of the flood of humanity, plunged into it with revulsion, even at the cost of being drowned in it? He would have given himself—as the saying goes—to know the truth. But the truth appeared to him, as ever, with a double face. On one side it said to him: "Be yourself; be like Marco Berti. War is a vocation, not a duty. It is infamous that everybody should be made to slay, inspiring himself with a hatred that not everybody feels in his soul. Flee! Desert! With the truly heroic bosom of him who

has dared to rescue his own reason of existence against everything and against everybody, breathe the air of foreign waters or the cold liberty of the boundary summit!"

Flee, desert, or more simply, remain in hiding with an easy conscience! Even this would require courage. Wherever he turned, the thought of fear clung to him like a foul odour that sullies one's shoes on the road. Then appeared the other face of truth, saying: "In this will to surpass yourself, to be a martyr and a soldier, like all the others who either do not desire to or cannot escape the war and martyrdom,—in this dwells your nobility. The more you struggle, the loftier you become, even though, rid of the wretchedness of your flesh, you should recognise that you are not worthy of life, and consider yourself worthy of being cast about like a rag in the retting pond."

He would listen to himself as he thought these resounding words, and would conclude them with a reminiscence of his school days: "Thus spoke the hero . . ."

"The hero," he interrupted himself suddenly,—"that hero am I."

"And"—interrupting himself once more—"that's the way people go crazy."

He was failing miserably, and his cheeks, which were not shaved daily, were growing hollow. One evening on which he had not taken any food, the major said to him:

"My dear lieutenant, you ought to go to the hospital and then get a month's furlough for convalescence. Go back to Calinni and breathe a little fresh air. The war—take my word for it—won't be over to-morrow, and there's plenty of time for heroics. Your health comes first of all, and when you've got your health," he finished, with a coarse laugh, "you've got everything, heroism included."

Filippo said nothing, but stared fixedly at Eugenia, who sustained his glance. After lunch she rejoined him under the willows by the canal, as he was walking to the clink of his spurs up and down the gravel path, mercilessly conscious of a ridiculous similarity between the haughty peacock and him-

self. But he was irrevocably directed toward an indignation that was half cold and half hot, whence might have been inferred some sort of marital or paternal authority over the woman whose approach he felt.

"You're mad, do you hear?" she said to him in a voice hoarse with scorn, stopping him short. As he stood still she felt her anger evaporate, as if it had all been merely mechanical. "Mad and wicked. This is an iniquity pardonable only in a sick man. . . . Yes, you're sick, so how are you to blame? It's horrible of you to imagine that I could have told papa . . . and told him what? You live only on wild imaginings . . . that I put the idea of the furlough into his head. Why, he's been considering it for quite a long time, seeing you so worn out. And then . . ."

"And then?"

"And then," added Eugenia, holding her eyes steady and precipitating the words so as not to allow time for shame, "this morning the colonel congratulated me, because he had heard about our . . . our engagement."

Every possibility, in a flatly unrolling series, occurred to Filippo's imagination. It might be that the major was thinking of marrying off his daughter, and that, in connivance with her, he had spread the net of this conversation, so as to force him to show his hand. It might also be that both father and daughter were innocent. It might even be that Eugenia, whether through sympathy or pity, had fallen in love with him. And she was beautiful. Flee her? Repel her who with a single confidence to a friend or to her future husband could render him a thing of scorn forever and paralyse his professional and political future? But how difficult it was to ask her hand! What humiliation if, in view of his poverty, his melancholy, and his illness, she should refuse it. What a burden if she were to grant it to him! Nothing, nothing could have for him the clearness of the morning atmosphere. This was surely the reason why it was so painful for him to greet every new sun. Everything to him lay in a haze like the endless twilight among the cloud-coloured willows.

Eugenia came from a family too upset by domestic troubles to allow illusions as to dowry, yet genteel enough to forecast a life of more or less luxury. Family! Genteel! It suddenly leaped into his mind that it was ridiculous to marry the daughter of such a mother and have, in a manner of speaking, two fathers-in-law,—one an inn-keeper with a napkin over his arm—ha! ha!—and the other a major who was never promoted. All Calinni would have plenty to gossip about. Federico, too, would have a sly smile (he was now goading his imagination with a lance of hatred toward the slope of slander),—Federico, who had probably possessed her, and who had certainly kissed her upon the mouth. Furtively he glanced at those lips, which barely stood out from the surface of her face, as weak as eyelashes. It was impossible to kiss them. Eugenia's beauty lacked both scent and gladness; it exhaled a sort of sadness. And the wife whom he courted in the intimacy of his emotions, to whom he sought to give a countenance and a name, must bring him everything—security and pleasure, the splendour of her smile and whatever was needful —however little, just what was needful—for him to pluck the last roses of youth without stinging himself upon the thorns of financial care.

Before his eyes rose the only woman he had ever loved with an ingenuous love: Ersilia, the student of letters, when, beneath a flourishing apple-tree, she placed her fragrant hands upon his shoulders, and, her round face covered with blushes, her youthful bosom swelling with emotion and showing beneath her blouse, she said to him in that voice of hers which recalled a gluttonous child: "Why don't you marry me?" And he had been upon the point of saying yes. But all past and present images paled before the recollection of Mary,—of the woman whose deep black eyes shone like stars behind her veil. He could not think of her without a repressed groan shaking his whole being. Impassive in outward semblance, he writhed as beneath the violence of a nameless iniquity.

A few moments of silence ventilated by the first, indecisive hour of evening had been enough for this fantastic gallop.

A sudden chorus of frogs awoke him. Now, as often occurred to him after these devastating incursions in his heart, he felt as if he had just set fire to a stack of straw. Everything grew black, consumed, crackling. Inexplicably, as he turned toward the house, he sought Eugenia's hand. It seemed to him as if Mary Corelli were walking along somewhat apart and beheld them, preceding them by a few paces that she might with her nimble arms part the thick branches of the trees and make them a path. Eugenia gave him her hand to lend him faith, but she did not abandon it to him, taking care that the pressure, which was already light, should not lighten into a caress.

Filippo was granted a month's leave in which to convalesce. Whatever he did not need for his journey he shut up in a little chest, which he entrusted to his fellow guests with a confused soul. He could not have said whether there prevailed the desire to return at the very beginning of autumn with the tacit intention of finding another lodging, or the hidden hope of never again returning. It had been arranged, and he had promised Eugenia, not to stop at Rome. But he was unable to keep this promise, and in order to make peace with himself, he dug up the excuse that he was not in condition to make the entire journey at a single stretch.

Rome was like a small, sheltered bay which the tempest could not reach except as a sound which distance made musical. The street lamps, too, of the tree-lined suburban roads, painted an ultramarine blue against unlikely aerial raids, transported the solitary passer-by to the landscapes of a remoter planet, where the light was feebler and the sky appeared neither so splendid nor so cruel. His footfalls resounded at night upon the pavement, waking those fulsome echoes known to the stones of ancient cities buried in a history that will never return. By day, the ripe yellow of the countryside invaded the city, melting into a softness redolent of the blended aromas of honey and wheat. Whether it were merely appearance or reality, life seemed more leisurely and calmer than before the war. The west wind, rushing past

between the pines and the laurel, told impossible tales of sylvan peace which the dry dust swept playfully on with a dull crackle that lent a rhythm to the noonday silence. It was as if not space but time separated this city, bordered with green and besprinkled with water, from the mountains and the streams of carnage. Not unaware of what was taking place beyond the amethyst mountains, it rocked, like a pleasure boat at anchor in the dock, in the security of its sheltered quiet.

Wherefore, in the cafés and in the homes, they still debated upon the war with a cold interest. They made wagers as to the winner and the length, they discussed landings and revolts. Filippo, during the months at Novesa, and above all when he had been convinced that the intervention of Italy would not precipitate the decision, had almost lost his view of the whole, and the bulletins from the neighbouring front had occupied only that portion of his time which was not claimed by the minute cares of service or of his intimate torment. Now he was surprised by these panoramic contemplations of the past and of the future in which so many took pleasure from the vantage point of a neutral observatory. And everybody found him changed, because he no longer entertained cut and dried opinions upon the course of the war, which formerly had appeared to him at times, though he did not say so, like a tropical flood to a lost explorer who knows neither its source nor its mouth. He listened with his head in his hands, and joined the talk but rarely. Taramanna, who was preparing without any undue haste to have himself appointed a lieutenant in the Signal Corps, said to him:

"You've become a serious person, Rubè. The war's aging you."

"What war?" he replied, seeking an insinuation in every word. "I haven't seen active service yet, and when I do, war will rejuvenate me."

He remained at Rome for a week, every day postponing his departure to the next. But he simply had to see his men and women friends, and not daring to seek them out, he would walk along the streets that he knew they frequented, hoping

to happen upon them by accident. There was not one who was not courteous. They inquired very little after his health, and less still after his journey and his return. Yet he could not succeed in grasping that his affairs were not of such moment to others as to himself, and he judged this discretion a prearranged act of pity. But he accepted it without rancour, even from his adversaries, the neutralists of ante-bellum days, who could have cried slacker and deserter in his face (perhaps, he suspected, eyeing them furtively, they masticated those just words like bitter saliva, after he had passed by), and instead, when they saw him come along in civilian clothes, they brought their hands to their hat-brims with absent-minded courtesy, as when one bares his head as a matter of course before a funeral.

He would wait around for Mary Corelli in the vicinity of the Via Gregoriana where she lived, trying, however, without admitting it to himself, to be near the intersection of some street so that he might disappear around the corner if he saw her coming along with Federico. One morning he passed on the Via Sistina one of the first men who had been decorated for valour, with his face all skinned by an explosion and his almost browless eyes set in two red circles. It was horrible, but on his grey-green bosom he wore a blue ribbon that to the sick eyes of Filippo grew until it became humid, elastic, deep as a fragment of the Roman azure. Shortly after it seemed to him that a dense rosy cloud was floating through the sky, and it was Mary, dressed in red, approaching him from the other end of the street with the brilliance of flight. In the hero whom he could not emulate, in the dear woman whom he could not make his own, there appeared to him almost simultaneously the images of a double, unattainable beatitude: that of serenity before death and of self-certainty in love.

"How are you, how are you?" asked Mary, with a trill in her voice, clapping her hands in welcome. "My dear Rubè!"

Without pausing for reflection, with his pupils aglow, he replied:

"Quite well."

The left corner of his mouth quivered.

"Give me news of Eugenia, and at once. Is she as beautiful as ever?"

"As beautiful as ever," repeated Filippo, lingering for a long while upon that "ever" with a hint of boredom of which he quickly felt ashamed. But he could not keep from adding, even as he realised the stupidity of his speech: "No one is as beautiful as Miss Mary."

Miss Mary smiled ineffably. With silent complaisance at the compliment? Or friendly indulgence for the flatterer? Filippo thought that he had discovered the answer that evenning, when one of the Taramanna girls told him that within three days Mary and Federico would be officially betrothed. Then he telephoned and could understand nothing of the involved excuses of the girl (she thought he had known—she supposed that he was only passing through Rome—Eugenia, yes, she had indeed told her in a letter that he had a month's furlough—but it seemed as if Eugenia had thought he was going straight to Calinni—why, yes, was there any need of saying so? She'd be happy to see him that day) and he decided to leave just before the announcement of the engagement. But instead he remained, and climbed up to the last flight of the last house on the Via Gregoriana, whence Rome glittered like a buried treasure. The apartment was filled with Savonarola chairs, with copies of Florentine sculptures, with books bound in calfskin and flowered pasteboard. There was also a certain number of maternal aunts and uncles, who, since Mary's Italian father and American mother had perished in the wreck of the *Ulysses,* had gathered around the rescued baby and the summit of Rome,—the city and the creature whom they loved with an undivided love.

Between Filippo and Federico there was a handclasp and a few words of ardent conventionality. Filippo manœuvred the whole time to find himself alone in a corner with Mary, without exactly knowing why he wished this; while she, who divined his desire, satisfied it by handing him, with the gentle gesture of a donor, some embroidery that she had done for the curtains of her new house. She wished him to appreciate the Sicilian style: cloths perforated with such precision that

they seemed like leaves of a pale and almost immaterial metal.

"I admire the embroidery," said Filippo at last, "but more than anything else I admire you two."

"She looked at him inquiringly.

"For it is admirable," he explained, "to construct while almost everybody is intent upon destroying. There are countless bandages being made for the wounded in these days, and it's beautiful to see that there is still cloth left for embroidery and yarn for the needles."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Mary, blushing, "I hope really to become a nurse. Freddy . . ."

"It's beautiful to see a man and a woman who seem to say: 'The war does not exist,' and who have the strength to live as if they were the only two people in the world, Adam and Eve, dressed in khaki linen and red silk. Shocking?" he asked, surprising the distracted silence of his listener, who to one infatuated with listening to himself might have seemed to have become suddenly hostile.

But she was so remote that his feebly ironic remark drew her attention for but an instant, fixing her glance, which at once wandered off again. Federico was at the other end of the hall with a group of guests who were centred about the glasses and the sweets, unconscious of the watchfulness of Filippo, who as he spoke to Mary looked furtively at her betrothed out of burning eyes, expecting a jealous, or at least, a hostile glance. Rubè, misled by the worldly polish in which Federico seemed to have forgotten even his betrothed, was hurt in his pride and persisted.

"You know very well what winds are blowing. Up to May, even to June, it might have been supposed that Italy's entrance into the war would have a decisive effect. In that event, the damage done to the world's ancient structure would have been possible to repair in a year or two. Not now. Now it's clear that the world will burn until there's nothing left to consume. This is the age of fire. Then will follow the age of ashes. A wind of perdition is blowing. But you build your nest in the thickest of the forest, hoping that the wind will glide by you and be heard just loud enough to give

a sensation of a sweet, dizzying see-saw to the ones dozing amidst the feathers. It's so good, during the thunder and lightning, to be behind a window covered with sixteenth-century embroideries with perforations that play hide and seek. I speak in all seriousness. I admire you two. The fate of the human species is entrusted to those few who, within eight or ten years, when this conflagration will have spent itself, will have the pride to say, 'I was not there.' But, Signorina Mary, don't become a nurse. Let matters stand. Things are either done or not done. It's better, infinitely better, not to do them. Just imagine what the world will be like in ten years if there'll be nobody in it with a little health, youth, reason. Oh! At least see to it that one beautiful woman shall not have touched a wound, and that a man, a single man, shall not have killed."

His last words were spoken with such emphasis that Federico himself turned his neck for a moment, but without letting his glance cross his glasses.

"Freddy," resumed Mary in a hazy voice, at first without softening the fixed glance of her eyes, which had been motionless as if she were engaged in soliloquy, but gradually approaching her interlocutor as if her attention were descending a staircase step by step, "Freddy would not have me even be a nurse. He says that we're upon the banks, and that if the flood should rise that's no reason for thrusting our toe into it, then our ankles, then our knee and the rest. He says it's no business of ours to decide whether we shall go to the bottom, or swim, or keep dry. This way of letting yourself be engulfed by life under the pretext that you are engulfing it, he calls unhealthy. I should say impious. He says that if the war wants us it will take us, willy-nilly, and that it's by no means certain that the man in the water is worse off than the fellow who's remained at the engines. I don't know whether I agree with him. I remember. I remember."

She shook her hair and started back, when she recalled that she was speaking to Filippo.

"I beg your pardon," she hastened to say, for she never mingled English with her Italian unless it was in the family

circle or in her inner thoughts. "I remember when the *Ulysses* went up in flames, and I don't know how I found myself among the first in the water,—a slip of a lass, twelve years old, with a long nightshift that reached to my feet. A single, futile thought came to me at the time: 'Oh, how lucky I was to have learned how to swim that summer on Long Island!' Then I was picked up by a boat, and I asked myself: 'Who can tell in which of those other boats so packed with people are my papa and mamma. Perhaps they're together, perhaps one's in one boat and one's in the other. I'd like to pass close by and play peek-a-boo with my head hidden in my arms.' But when we all reached the ladder of the *Assyrian,* I ran up with all my might as if I wished to leap to the deck, and there I took my stand to watch everybody who came on. You can imagine that it was something like the crowds at the station gates when the train comes in. They weren't there, no. Then, for two days in succession I made the rounds of the vessel, up and down and in and out, even in the steerage, and I kept asking myself 'What could have become of them?' It's queer that I kept saying that, yet I no longer believed that they were there,—I well remember that I no longer believed. There were so many people crying and shrieking at first; then they grew less in number, and those who couldn't console themselves gave plenty of annoyance to the others. They were left brooding alone in the corners. Or else they stared into the sea. I bothered nobody. I had become interested in jumping a hundred times in succession with the rope. There was also the nurse from another family who took such good care of me,—finally too good. All this seemed very strange to me. Never, never did I ask a soul about papa and mamma. I didn't cry once. When we reached Genoa, all my uncles and aunts leaped on board in a row to take me along with them. I recall very clearly that I looked for a long time behind the last of them, as if the procession hadn't finished and papa and mamma would appear somewhere. I almost did not respond to the kisses. It's strange. I don't remember ever having spoken for so long about it and so fully, until this evening. . . . Freddy," she resumed, softly, after a pause, "says that we must stick

to our posts, not defy fate, and go only if we are called. It may be that he's right, but I'm not convinced. I fear that even this—how shall I put it?—this resolute aloofness is a rash way of tempting fate. I don't know. I only know that I'm so frightened. . . . Freddy!" she called, in a new, strange voice that seemed to have risen from a deep, inner source, "why don't you come over to us?"

He drew near reluctantly, with a studied smile, and the conversation assumed a conventional tone.

CHAPTER V

THE following day Filippo managed to leave for Calinni. The rows of olive trees in the whitish brightness of the Tyrrhenian coast seemed to scan a phrase that he repeated until it lost its meaning: "Why didn't I learn to swim on some Long Island?" At the bottom of his heart he felt impatient to reach his native scene, but he knew that this impatience was not tenderness, and that his mother, his sisters, the rustic belfries, with their galleries filled with the clear heavens and with sparrows, scarcely figured in it. Nor did he expect, at the top of that clear, native mountain, to recover his health, which lay beyond reach at the bottom of his dark conscience, like a treasure fallen into a well. He hoped, more than anything else, to find some letters from Eugenia, perhaps only to read in the lines, or between them, assurances of her faithful custody of his secret.

"If only," he exclaimed, in a crisis of inconsolable egoism, "if only I could love her!"

He found but a couple of illustrated postcards bearing regimental views, with coloured emblems and cannon, and the initials E. B. He replied almost at length, exaggerating both his physical derangement and his moral need of returning "toward" the front. At Calinni, however, neither dissimulation nor excuse was necessary. They lived as if they had inherited from endless generations a philosophy which in its practical workings coincided with Federico's attitude, but which possessed a more aloof and indolent background. They underwent the war without taking part in it either with their minds or their hearts, but also without cursing any one. They would utter, ceremoniously, some commonplace in honour of a local citizen who had been decorated, and the communal council would congratulate his family. Placidly they would weep over the son of a neighbour who had been killed by a bomb.

They did not view deserters with horror, and they admired the cunning of the slackers. They were happy at the good fortune of a certain fellow who had been taken prisoner at the very start "and had thus found a haven of safety." They whispered, with solicitous and conniving sympathy, about another who, having deserted while on leave of absence, had taken refuge on a farm unknown to any but the carbineers. Those who had a surplus of grain and oil rubbed their hands at every rise in prices, concluding that it's an ill wind that blows no good. The communal secretary, coming upon Filippo, said to him loyally, eye to eye:

"Bravo, don Filì! Good for you to have come back. What was the sense of acting crazy? My son Calogero is on the Isonzo and is doing himself credit; his superiors open their eyes in amazement at his rash bravery. But he simply had to go and there was no help for it. That's the way with the Calinni blood; our neighbours can just walk idly along between the apothecary and the Casino and ask for nothing better, but when they go to the dance, they dance the tarantella, and *viva l'Italia,* by the Madonna!"

Filippo, staring at the ground, asked what regiment and what section Calogero was in, for he would like to hunt him up as soon as he returned. But his listener rebuked him with affectionate anger, as a father draws the covers over a son who is irrationally desirous of getting up with the tertian fevers to resume his studies among the books.

"Don Filì, let's not talk nonsense. What do you mean,—return! Return indeed! You're back now with your mother, and you ought to remain with your mother and think of your health and then get back to your business and to politics, for the district of Calinni expects big things of lawyer Rubè. You know the proverb: Better a half-able live one than a dead hero."

Perhaps, as other folk murmured to him with a smile, Calogero was not so near to the Isonzo as his father would have persons suppose. But these details interested him little in comparison with that lukewarmness common to all his fellow citizens, which made them discuss the war in the same tones

as if it were the midsummer sun or the hail, with the regulation references to fate and the will of God.

Their standards of good and evil were different from those publicly professed in the newspapers and in the large cities. Lucietta herself, who had been engaged to the vice-prætor, recounted with the utmost candour, during the long Sunday visits, her alternations of hope and fear for the outcome of a certain intrigue, which with the aid of the syndic and of other authorities she was trying to carry through for the exemption of her betrothed.

"I hope to God," said his mother one day, "that Lucietta can marry soon. The Fiumegrande wine sells to the government at a good profit. If you don't go back to fight and can give thought once more to your own affairs, Sofia and I will breathe easily for the first time since the death of poor papa." And she concluded with a sigh that was like a prayer.

Filippo would have wished to let himself be enwrapped in this sheltering indulgence. But he was kept restless in expectation of letters from Eugenia, and he felt an inner quivering at the footsteps of Enrico Stao, the Socialist, who was divined even before he turned the corner and who scoured the whole region, making the stone pavement ring beneath his handsome hunter's boots.

At Calinni everybody adopted a very leisurely gait and lingered in groups upon the square, before the apothecary's like flies upon the edge of a plate. Enrico Stao, on the contrary, took big strides in the middle of the road only, as if he were always late and the ground burned beneath his feet. So that they all disliked him; he didn't seem to belong to Calinni, and was ignorant of the art of living and letting one's neighbour live, with that slouch hat of his, his bronze-hued beard, and those round-eye-glasses that made him look like an owl and with which he never gazed at anybody, scarcely touching his brim if there really happened to be anybody who cared to salute him. He was for all the world like a stranger who had just arrived at the inn! The populace attributed aims to him at which they laughed between their teeth, averring that he

wanted to organise the countryside for the division of the land, to have himself named deputy after the war, and to give a reception to the gentlemen and to the slackers.

"Meanwhile, he," concluded the pharmacist, "doesn't go to war because he has his short-sightedness as an excuse. And he strides up and down the landscape as if he had been sent up to make a report on it." And he imitated the Socialist's manner, spreading apart his twisted legs, assuming the sullen look of a cranky teacher, and strutting across the space between the bench and the main door.

"He," retorted Pasquale Tartaglia, out of sheer contrariness, "doesn't have to go because he's a So-Socialist. Yes, sir, it may be true that he's short-sighted, but he has a good pair of eye-glasses, and he sees the misdoings of these gentlemen and the slackers, who are all getting fat on the blood of the p-poor, and the day of judgment will c-come."

To these discussions Filippo, whenever he could avoid them without appearing uppish, preferred solitude. Toward the time for evening prayers he would slip away through a lane where the villagers saluted him with round, smiling, empty eyes, and would lean against the parapet of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, watching the mist rise in the valley. Upon the slope opposite he would see a few red lights flare up, he would hear the barking of a stray dog and the churning of the water in the mill-race. Half closing his eyes, he could see the silent flour reposing inside the mill beside the images of the saints pasted to the walls, and even the mist seemed as white and holy as the flour. Now the mist rose, solemn and transparent, as if a cotton sheet shot through with stars were covering the slumber of his native soil. The panorama was suffused with motionless eternity and with that melancholy that weighs upon perfect things. But he could not enjoy it with an untroubled spirit, and other images peopled his soul. The bastion of the mountain, over which he bent with his temples between his hands, became to him a "position"; he called to mind the corrections upon the target tables, one here, two there, yonder three, asking himself which should be applied to aim from top to bottom; he beheld himself in com-

mand of a battery, with orders to send troops into action at the bottom of the valley. Here was the cannon service, as solemn as a mass, with the men as precise and austere as if the cannon were an altar. Here was the command to open fire; now the dazzling explosions lighting the gloom of twilight; now the martial shudder running up one's spine. And he shuddered in reality, and smiled shamefully at his shuddering, as he heard the bleating of the last, lingering flock that was being herded to its fold.

From Eugenia he received first a letter in which the exaggerated size of the handwriting evidenced her attempt to say nothing in four full pages. But it was immediately followed by a full, agitated missive. There was a possibility that Major Berti's division would be sent forward. His promotion, too, seemed not far distant. In that case Eugenia would try to have herself assigned to a field hospital. If they left Novesa, she wished to know how to dispose of the chest that Filippo had entrusted to them. To whom was she to give it over? Or was she to send it on to Calinni? No, for the love of God let not Filippo say, even in jest, that he would return before he was entirely recuperated. War is prodigality, and only those who are rich, rich in health, in youth, in joy, may spend themselves. Filippo's first duty was to put his wealth in order, to recover his health; for he, too, was a rich spirit, but he had squandered himself. Yes, she knew about the formal engagement of Federico and Mary. They had done well. Federico, too, was rich in strength and joy, and he was not in a hurry to waste his wealth, and he had the right to a companion who would bring a similar dowry to their union. She was not alluding, of course, to the Corelli fortune. There is something that counts more than money, and that is the impulse (as hidden and as perpetual as the beating of one's heart) to consider life a rare, magnificent thing. On this score Federico and Mary resembled each other like sister and brother. She did not know why; but, as she considered them at her distance, it seemed to her that they ought to celebrate their wedding upon horseback, in the open, straight in their stirrups. Like American riding-masters, perhaps? But no, she had no desire to

make fun of them. She merely put it that way,—a queer whim of hers.

On reading Eugenia's letter over for the second time, Filippo decided, with a flash of will the like of which he could not recall in all the years he had lived, unless it were on that distant day when he had resolved to leave his province and seek his fortune in Rome, to leave at once without waiting for the expiration of his furlough. The women of the house and his fellow citizens he informed that he had received sudden orders to leave. As a novelty whose strangeness amazed him, he did not even pause to analyse the motives that impelled him. He knew that they were all there within his consciousness,—the good and the bad, the clear and the equivocal, and that he could summon them forth when he should wish. But he let them remain inside, like old things in a drawer. To his mother, who accompanied him to the coach and asked whether she should resume sending him the monthly sum, he replied coldly: "Don't trouble yourself any further."

Donna Giulia and the two sisters returned to the house and found the secretary there. He tried to console them: "Courage, Donna Giulia. He who has drunk will drink, and he who has come back will return once again."

But the mother shook her head incredulously.

At Novesa Filippo was received at the villa by the major's customary cheer and Eugenia's anxiety; she reproached him for having returned so thin and sallow. But there was something else, indefinable, in her eyes. He told her a number of tales about his journey, and he realised that he would please himself and Eugenia if he did not stress the subject of Mary and Federico. That evening he heard the aerial alarm with altered heart; not without tremors, but mingled with his tremors was an avid curiosity. During the entire dinner hour he asked after news of the forces, and paid as close attention as if he were a regular. Berti had all sorts of tales to tell: promotions, transfers, overturns, gossip. For a change he dominated the conversation; and in order not to lose his advantage, he continued to speak even when his mouth was full

of food. At last he reached the best of all, the famous story of the great-coats.

"Yes, you must know about it, too," said Eugenia, finally laughing,—"the famous story of the great-coats. It's all I've been hearing for the past fortnight."

The story of the great-coats was that one fine day a warehouse in Novesa found two hundred great-coats missing; that, after due investigation had been made, it seemed probable that Captain Arcais, commander of a company of infantry who had passed through Novesa and was now fighting at San Michele, had gone ahead and appropriated them; that the most stupid bureaucratic red-tape had prevented the business from being settled; and that in the meantime the superiors were storming, and threatened the end of the world.

"I wonder," interrupted Filippo, "whether it wouldn't be simpler to send somebody to San Michele to see how things stand. Within twenty-four hours the business would be cleared up."

"That's so. But this wouldn't be their way of doing business. It would be too sensible. And then, whom are we going to send into that inferno? These artillery officers have esprit de corps, and they don't fancy contact with the infantry."

"I'll go. To-morrow," said Filippo, as a wave of blood rose to his face. And in order to win an ally, he sought furtively Eugenia's hand.

Berti turned to his daughter as if to ask her advice.

"All right. Go," he concluded, turning over his opened hand. "That will put an end to the business."

In the garden, under the crescent moon, Filippo and Eugenia lingered long after Berti had gone to bed. But they said little. They strolled between the ailing trees, which were tinged a yellow that seemed golden. Filippo's eyes often scanned the ground.

"What is it you're looking so intently at?" asked Eugenia, as if he were staring at her slipper and her exposed ankle.

"At your shadow. And mine. There's something that belongs to us. I was thinking that if anybody could seize them

and throw them into the canal, we'd be left poverty-stricken, with nothing to our names."

She shook her tresses. She did not understand.

"Yes, we have only ourselves and our burden. We are not rich, like . . . like Federico and . . ."

A gesture from the woman silenced him.

"Yet," said Filippo, "you have something with which you could enrich me. You could make me a gift."

"What?" she asked, leaning against the garden wall.

He dared to place a tremulous hand upon her shoulder and brought his face forward.

"No, no," she whispered in a low voice, preparing to elude his grasp.

"No?" His arm fell to his side.

"Not now. . . . Afterwards. . . ."

"That's it. You know me . . . as I am, and you don't want to reward me unless . . . unless I've proved my fearlessness."

"It isn't that," she said, almost moaning.

She surrendered to his lips a frigid mouth that seemed kissed for the first time and that did not awake.

The following morning Filippo found a place in a lorry that was returning empty to Cervignano.

It was almost noon when he left the trench-furrowed field. For a long stretch of the road he felt the stupor of the intermediary zone between the interior of the country and the battlefield. The population had in great measure disappeared and the soldiery was rarely to be seen. The autumn sun varnished the closed villas and softened the leaves of the plane-trees with a deadly but soothing breath. One breathed a quiet permeated by idyllic carefreeness there where, at a bend, in a glade, the territorials with their nude waists were washing themselves at the fountain and the unbridled mules were sniffing the earth. Peace and war were equally remote, as indifferent as life and death in certain supine preagonic beatitudes bereft alike of affection or hope. However smooth the sky might be, the motionlessness of the landscape seemed to betray muffled trepidations such as tempest warnings scatter amidst tree trunks and

through the subsoil. These things Filippo saw from the interior of the wagon in which he was huddled, invisible to the others and almost to himself.

He knew as usual the defaming formula of what he had done the night before. "With my baseness I have redeemed a woman who allowed herself to be kissed, so that she should not call me vile and also to spite the man to whom she had first been engaged. So that I've succeeded at last in what I was premeditating for a long time, lurking around for a moment of deceitful impulse, like the country robber who keeps watch over a gate until a night when the gardener's absent-mindedness leaves it open. I wanted to tear from that woman a secret equal to my own, so as to hold it against her as a guarantee of my security. Now I have it. I have a kiss that was half charity and half revenge, as cold as the coin that is dropped from the third story down to the street musician." But he pronounced these atrocious insults with well-ordered oratorical complacency, as if they referred to some accused party or other, or as if they were insubstantial imaginings outside of all truth. "If," suggested another voice of his soul, "you were really the fellow you have been mercilessly describing, so guilty and at the same time so unrelenting toward your guilt, you would already be either redeemed or damned. But your lungs would not be breathing this air." He saw, however, that the clearness of the air was not polluted by his thoughts and that his pulse was vigorous, stimulated by the journey. Then his sharp mind, hedged in at the sides, stretched forward, toward the unknown horizon. "There where the blue of the sky condenses into a ridge of mountains that as yet have neither name nor feature,—yonder lies the reconciliation of myself with myself." Closing his eyes, he magnified in his mind the throbbing of the motor, the bouncing of the wheels, the creaking of the axles, the echo of the depopulated villages through which they passed on their way, until he could imagine the thunder of bombardment. He wished an hour, but a single hour, of deafening fire, so loud that he could not hear the beating of his heart. Amidst this flying destruction to feel his own soul immobile, rooted in destiny! To forget Eugenia, or at least, to love her;

not to recall that kiss as an ignoble insolence or an insupportable duty!

Then came more flat lands, and little cities bustling with animation and vivacity. The zone of silence, the bandage of wadding that isolated the palpitant body of war, had now been crossed. On this outer margin, the war took on a festive appearance, like fever that lights the face with the complexion of sanguine health. At Palmanova, at San Giorgio di Nogara, the soldiers, the petty officers, the Red Cross nurses, blended with whatever had remained of the chaffering, profiteering populace, stirred with a certain harmony, like a village crowd on the day of a procession. Those who were transporting mess or were attending to other duties adopted an affable gait, as if on a pleasure stroll. The men at liberty struck their heels upon the pavement with a dignified, gratuitous haste. The open-air tables of the Palmanova hostelries, surrounded by soldiers before brimful beakers, with a background of massive, archaic fortifications, called to mind those lithographs in which nothing has remained of a war whose bloodshed has been forgotten except the festive picturesqueness.

After another stretch of heavier silence the lorry had to stop before two carts that were obstructing a curve. Then Filippo perceived from the eastern horizon, where already the hills stood out against the blue, a compact, rather sweet-sounding rumble that seemed deadened by a velvet covering, similar perhaps to the receding thunders up in the mountains when the storm has spent itself. But the thunder, even when it lurks in hiding, threatens, and strikes the atmosphere with curt peals. This rumbling, on the other hand, was tepid, inquiring, confidential, as soft as the running of playful fingers over the hide of a drum. Only from time to time did that hand seem to grasp the stick and evoke a brief, more distinct tremolo. With a sudden start he recognised the voice of the cannon. It sounded friendly; feared for so long a time because too much desired?

It was outcried and hidden from him soon by the harsh voices of the chauffeur and the drivers disputing over the blame for the tangle and the manœuvres necessary to undo it.

Here were men to whom it was a matter of indifference whether they heard the cannon or not; they heard its roar approach without a tremor, they heard it disappear without a sigh of relief; they even permitted their minds to be taken away from it by one of those highway disputes that took place out of weary habit. Had they been like that since the very first day that they entered the war territory? Or had they become gradually accustomed to it like the sailor who no longer heeds the raging of the sea? In a flash, as it were, he seemed to discover that to almost all the human race, death and immortality are matters of a feeble, rare curiosity, certainly more present than in plants and the lower animals, yet distant, nebulous, as little contemplated as the landscape by the peasant. Very few men walk along with their gaze directed toward heaven, in thought of death; either they flee it in opprobrious terror or seek it with insane ardour. But the one and the other of these two excesses originate in an identical weakness of those imperceptible spiritual fibres with which the sound, common man, on the other hand, roots himself like a vegetal growth into daily life, sinking as far down as he can, without exaltation, and detaching himself whenever necessary, without any other spasm than that of his crushed flesh.

That was how he understood matters. And he came to the conclusion that it did not pay to be one of those few in whom the thought of death and immortality becomes exasperating or enfeebles the sense of life. To be like all the others: this is what he thought wisdom.

But when he descended from the wagon at Cervignano he hesitated.

"With a little stool like this," said the chauffeur, who looked on in impassive enjoyment of what he considered the officer's stupidity, "you can break your collar bone."

The roads swarmed with soldiers of every rank and with rows of carriages, but there was also a remnant of the town citizenry and it was evident that of war and danger—except the proximity—there was no more here than there had been at Palmanova or at Novesa. Filippo appreciated this with his intelligence, but as far as concerned his nerves he was already

in the midst of the battle, and he listened intently to every rumble that rose above the soft murmur of the cannonading, even as a connoisseur awaits the entrance of the various instruments in the orchestral choir. He took a bite at an officers' table, forcing his appetite and drinking. At one of the commands he learned that captain Arcais's company was no longer stationed at San Michele, but at the Rocca di Monfalcone. The news at once pleased and grieved him, for he thought that perhaps he was going into a sector where the danger was more endurable.

To a superior who asked what his mission was, he told the tale of the great-coats, and he did not find it strange that his listener laughed and replied: "You have plenty of time to spare in your entrenched camps."

In truth, it had almost required an effort on his part to recall his mission, and he was amazed at the thought that the inquiry as to the great-coats was the goal of his journey. What did he care about this? And, as he gave the mattter further thought, what did he really care about anything?

Here were the hills of the Carso, of a leonine yellow, amidst whose barren spurs vibrated the fierce and treacherous battle. Further along, toward the north, the weary depression of the Julian Alps, sloping down toward a grey sea. This was the sacred boundary. How much iron and how much blood to scale it, and how distant it was!

An entire wounded populace seized upon these first supports, upon these flame-hued hills, gnawed at the stony ground as they measured the inaccessible wastes, grappled at the gnarly soil so as not to slide back again into the valley. He recalled what he had heard and what he himself had pronounced in a prophetic voice during his interventionist speeches, upon the sanctity of defence, upon the end of the tyrants, the justice of boundaries, the perpetuity of nations. He recalled the hymns, the standards, the fanfares, the applause when the guards relieved each other before the Quirinal. But the shudder that rippled over him at his recollection of that irremediable past was one of shame and all at once his cheeks stippled with the thousand pins of an uneasy conscience that knows it

has lied. Now, instead, his soul was invaded by an increasing number of platitudes against war and its causes and its purposes which he had formerly repelled in indignation. Rather, yes, rather the primitive out-and-out wars of prey. And better the religious wars, when people fought for heaven and had to die and find the sky empty before they learned of the deception. But now it needed only survival to recognise the nullity of all this carnage of sacrifice to the idols of justice and the sovereign-people.

Alone, on foot, he advanced over the road to Monfalcone. He thought he could behold his own soul, as tawny and sterile as the hills amidst whose valleys rolled the thunder of the artillery. How different was this music from the soft rustling he had perceived between Palmanova and Cervignano! And how well worth hearing!

The military bustle upon the road, which at intervals, as Filippo had been warned, was exposed to enemy fire, was hushed,—one would have said carpeted with felt, out of precaution and habit. It seemed to him that they were all silent, with their spirits and their ears turned toward the east, in voluntary attention to the fire which, upon reflection, he found to be extremely rare. At times, too, the compact roar of the cannons seemed to cease, so as to accentuate the pyrotechnical grace of a burst of shrapnel that spattered across the nearby horizon, or to make way for the precipitous recitation of the machine guns. Forest similes seemed to flock in caricatured fashion over the leafless landscape. The blunt, choral bellowing of the most distant batteries,—did not this resemble the waters and the wind inside a chestnut grove? The machine guns simulated the presuming gaiety of the frogs during the moonlit nights, and a stray fusillade called to mind the dry strokes of the woodpecker. But from time to time a nearby shell seemed the rattling of a colossal bronze door pushed by a gigantic, raging hand: the low, empty gates of heaven. Owing to his inexperience, Filippo could not tell whether this was an especially active or an ordinary day at the front. When the air vibrated with the explosions, he felt impelled forward as by the workings of a bright, precise spring, with a delicious,

seductive aroma in his veins and a quiver in his nostrils. On the other hand, if, during a pause, a mad silence reigned, resembling that which twists the trees during one gust and another of the tempest, a confused feeling in his breast, a whirling sensation in his entrails, would warn him that his cowardice had not died and that he dragged it on after him like a filthy beast in leash.

In this alternation of physical voluptuousness and carnal collapse was comprised all his life. Noting the malodorous gusts of perspiration that had soaked into his uniform, which was too tight, he scented an animal-like odour rise from his body. Yes, his spirit was devastated and fairly void; it held only courage and cowardice. Love and hate had been rooted out like saplings by a fury of flame. He sought in vain for vestiges of his love of country. The question of boundaries struck him as a mere pretext,—nothing more or less than the tale of the vanished great-coats. It was the war itself, the war in itself, that was fascinating. They trumped up any motive whatsoever, just as a band of excursionists takes a stick with a banner and strives to plant it upon an Alpine crest. Then afterwards they lose it on the road, or forget to plant it, or the wind suddenly carries it off. What counts is the ascent, and the panorama to be seen from the top. So, too, the nations make a fetich of some territorial dispute or question of honour even as he had made a fetich of the great-coats. There, at the side of the road, was a schoolhouse smashed to bits by shells. All these explosives were being touched off, all this blood being shed, just to settle in which language the children that attended that school should learn to read and write. It was a huge joke. Millions of men were ascending terrible calvaries so that they might at last view a panorama of themselves. They arranged meets in vast arenas in order to consume in solemn celebration their reserves of energy and wealth, exposing to danger their souls and their bodies. The body perished in a ring of iron and flame; the soul could perish in the iciness of terror. He would consider himself happy if he could emerge victorious from this game of chance, even with a leg or an arm missing, even with enough of his

body to feed the pride of his rescued soul, a simplified soul constituted of nothing else than cold courage. The boons thus preserved would seem veritable Golcondas, incomparable to those with which, like Federico, he would have been left distant from the ordeal. Eugenia herself would seem more precious than Mary Corelli.

This exaltation was accompanied by a hot increase of the nearby firing, which provided a rhythmic accompaniment to his inner words. He was marching now in the middle of the road, in time to the measures of a music heard by himself alone, upon the fringe of the hidden internal battle that was waged without the blasts of the bugle and the waving of flags.

A stifled but imperious voice sounded close to his ear:

"To the left! Flat on the ground!"

He obeyed just in time, stretching himself prone along the foundation of an isolated building that stood closed and intact along the road. In the fraction of a second he understood what that piston-like sound had been which he had heard above his head without heeding it. Then there followed a long whizz, a splash, an arpeggio of major and minor shrieks, the clear sound of falling tiles, a jet of powder. His heart beat fast.

"I believe I'm wounded," he thought.

"Perhaps I'm going to die," he added to himself.

He brought his palm to his cheek and withdrew it; it was slightly covered with blood. Then he pressed his knee to the ground so as to get up, to learn the extent of his wounds, but a hand weighed down upon his shoulder and compelled him to lie down again. The same voice as before said to him:

"Stay down! The best is yet to come. Damn the luck!"

And surely enough there soon came a heavy rumble, as if the barren landscape had miraculously sprouted dense vegetation, and between the thick blossoms insects as large as sparrows were droning. Ah, yes, those were the fragments; and this, this, then, was war, the real thing; and he was unwounded, and the tiny scratch upon his cheek was only an abrasion made by a flying bit of plaster or a chip of a tile that had been loosened by a shell. The final roars, in the certainty of being full and

loud, delighted him. He remained on the ground, stretched his limbs, feeling the soil under him as if modelled by his body, as in a moist garden at springtime. Cautiously he turned about just enough to see the sky splashed over by the gold of the afternoon. Then he was seized by an access of sensuality. He longed for the sunset, for evening with the moon's first quarter over the lazy western plain. And the moon that he dreamed had the long, feeble countenance of Eugenia.

Now he seemed to be inundated by an unexpressed happiness. Something was near to him,—something alive and engendered by him, and he could call it by a name, and he called it his heroism. Up to a short time previous he had dragged along beside him, like a filthy beast in leash, his cowardice. Now he had this warm, transparent thing, as palpitant as the joy of having been in the zone of death without having trembled and no longer believing in any of the illusions that send men to face death. Through his own free and arbitrary choice, on account of the affair of the great-coats, he was in the midst of steel and fire. In this rash and inconclusive defiance he thenceforth beheld the essence of heroism.

Who knows how long he would have lain thus, had not his accidental companion shaken him laughingly:

"All right. You can get up now, too."

He had the round, simple face of a boy.

"Humph! You're gloriously wounded. A mere nothing. A scratch. Let me wipe you . . . Fanelli."

"Rubè."

Together they went over to the spot where the projectile had fallen. It had grazed the gutter of the building and had landed fifty metres beyond the road, where it had dug a ditch in the fields. It had done no damage.

CHAPTER VI

At this juncture an unfamiliar voice pronounced Rubè's name somewhat doubtfully.

It was Garlandi, his travelling companion between Bologna and Venezia; his chevrons had been changed to those of the infantry, but even under the layer of dust he was as dandified as on that morning. He was leading a platoon of reinforcements that was on its way to Rocca di Monfalcone. For a while the three men walked along the road together; then Fanelli went off on his own affairs, saluting his companions with a joviality that scarcely received reply from Filippo, although a few minutes before he was certain that he loved this friend of a moment who had accompanied him in his baptism of fire.

Now he was all a prey to haste, pricked by a thorny impatience to finish that journey. He would have wished to hold in one hand his departure from Novesa and in the other his return, like the two ends of a running knot, and to tie and ensnare time. Now and then he repeated to himself the story of the great-coats so as not to forget the data of the matter. He could not understand very clearly the long explanation given by Garlandi, when he had been about his transfer to the infantry.

"After all . . ." began Filippo, interrupting him.

But another shell, following a trajectory similar to the one of a few minutes previous, silenced him. He listened to himself complacently, feeling a great pounding in his heart, not so different from the palpitation of voluptuousness, and a malignant intoxication which the sulphurous odour of the explosions sent from his nostrils to his brain.

"After all," he resumed, as soon as quiet had returned, "we were already at war when we passed through Due Macelli or through the Piazza Venezia in the crowded hours. Between

being run over by a tram and catching the splinter of a shell there isn't such a great difference. Eh?" he asked, after a pause, waiting a reply.

But Garlandi was not like him, who had only the tale of the great-coats to settle. Garlandi had his platoon, which had disbanded at the explosions, and it required a little time to get it back into squads of four.

"Are they all here?" he asked a sergeant after a few minutes.

"All."

"Nobody wounded?"

"Nobody."

"Is Rametta here, too?"

The sergeant looked about in leisurely perplexity, then, pointing with his finger, said:

"He's remained a bit in the rear."

"Go and fetch him," commanded Garlandi, without raising his voice, but turning pale.

"Now watch," he added, turning to Filippo, "what trouble I have from this stinking carrion."

And he cursed.

The soldier Rametta, a hundred paces away, was seated upon a pile of stones in the road with his legs astride, having a most difficult time—and this was strange, since not a breath of wind was blowing—in lighting a cigarette. Perhaps his lips were trembling, or the very force of his laboured breathing extinguished his matches. He listened to the sergeant without getting up; but it seemed that he tried. Then the sergeant seized him by the collar and shoved him forward, without any further violence, to where the lieutenant stood. When he let go, one might read upon his sallow, perspiring countenance a fatigue that was not solely corporeal.

"He says that he's completely exhausted. He's sick and wants to go to the hospital."

"That's not true," shouted Garlandi. "He was examined this very day before we started out, and was found as sound as an oak. Everybody knows it's not so."

The platoon had again broken formation, and the soldiers had naturally grouped themselves in a half circle s if to

witness a ceremony or a play. But their eyes were lowered. Rametta was huddled on the ground before the lieutenant, curled up, so that only his skull, as round as if shaved, and his sparse moustache that fell over his hands in which he concealed his face, could be seen.

"Get up, you carrion, and march!"

As he spoke he made as if to strike him in the head with the butt-end of the rifle. Rametta, who neither recoiled nor resisted, let his arm drop; raising his earthen-coloured face with its pale eyes, he said, tranquilly:

"Rather kill me."

Garlandi handed the rifle over to his orderly.

"Tell your man to send him to the Monfalcone hospital. Wash your hands of it," suggested Filippo, who was trembling a little. But Garlandi, casting an anxious eye over his platoon, divined that they were all wagering malignly in their hearts upon his weakness. Some of the soldiers had sat down nonchalantly upon the low walls, others were smoking, with provoking features. Then he felt all pity die in his bosom, and youth disappeared from his forehead.

"Rametta," he said, "I'm asking you for the last time. Get up and march."

Rametta raised only his yellow eyes once again, and repeated:

"Rather kill me."

At the same time there was heard the heavy quiver of a projectile that flew by at a short distance, as of an invisible bird of prey, and a long, mutinous murmuring among the soldiers.

"What are they saying?" asked Garlandi of his sergeant, half afraid and half pitilessly.

"I didn't catch it, sir."

"Resume march at once."

And turning about face, he prepared to set out again upon the road, looking toward Monfalcone, as if Rametta and the spirit of mutiny that was stirring in the ranks had been a brief nightmare that had been shaken by the first sign of a simplifying will. But the recalcitrant was still huddled on the ground, in the middle of the road.

Now came, one after the other, the explosions of a machine gun. It seemed like a wild animal with its lair in the tawny, barren landscape, and its voice was natural.

"Get up!" exploded Garlandi, voicelessly. With one hand he grasped the revolver-case that hung from his belt and with the other he shook the man on the ground rudely. But the man's form lay there heavily and tenaciously.

The sound of the revolver was hardly heard above the dull thunder of the machine gun, which continued to punctuate the atmosphere with dry shots like a mechanical jaw cracking nuts.

Filippo for some time had prepared to turn away so as not to witness the scene. Now he struggled in vain not to hear the dragging of a body through the dust and certain orders given in an opaque voice, such as one always employs in the presence of death.

Two minutes later, beside him whom Filippo did not gaze upon, the men of the platoon, in undulant fashion, and shaking the dust off them, closed ranks. They seemed like sheep when a cart passes in the midst of the flock and the dogs herd them back on to the right path.

But Garlandi and Rubè could not speak to each other until, having passed Monfalcone, they had entered the bare road that led to the Rocca.

"If I hadn't acted as I did," said Garlandi, then, "I'd be the only one to arrive at our destination, and I'd catch it hot and heavy."

"They've had some hot fighting at the Rocca this morning," he added, "and they need fresh troops. It's no enjoyment to me to be going where I'm bound. Nor to have done what I've done."

Filippo was silent. He could not help noting within him an icy, horripilant joy, because what he had just been present at had happened to Rametta and not to him. From time to time he repeated the *bang!* of the revolver to himself, and it seemed to him as if with that shot Garlandi had killed that filthy beast of fear which had dogged him up to that point of the road.

Only when he felt rising the horror of the scurfy earth where there reigned a silence as wide as a trap-door (only the tramping of the human throng was heard and a stench as from a lions' cage was smelled) did he ask, in order to distract his thoughts:

"Is he dead?"

The superfluous reply to the useless question was lost in a shrieking flight of 75-centimetre shells.

At the company's quarters the scene was very brief, but to Filippo it seemed interminable. The enemy's counterattack—they were two or three hundred metres beyond the hiding place where Captain Arcais was situated with some of his small staff—had not yet ceased, although it was gradually weakening with the approach of sunset. The captain was seated upon a chair, his legs stretched out and his feet resting upon a footstool. His face was drawn with an habitual tension of melancholy sarcasm, his moustache thin and straight, his lips thinned by constant command and danger.

When he heard about the great-coats he burst into a fit of somewhat theatrical anger, and seemed about to leap to his feet, despite his recent wound. A petty officer restrained him.

"Just listen," he exploded, glad of the sound of his own voice, "to this nonsense about the great-coats. They nearly took the life out of me, when I was at San Michele, with a basket of *scartoffie* that stank worse than asphyxiating gas. and here they're chasing me right up to the Rocca. Here's the ambassador. They even send me an ambassador!"

He scanned Rubè with leisurely derision.

"What's that you've got on your cheek? Scratch from a razor?"

Filippo, whose leg was trembling a little at the calf, managed to regain his composure and sat down for a moment with the combatants. But he replied, stupidly:

"I am wounded; a tile fell on my face."

It required the intervention of Garlandi, who in the meantime had given his report upon the incident of the road, to explain matters better. Otherwise the men who were around the cap-

tain would not have stopped laughing (for with all this laughing not even the shots were any longer heard).

"Very well," replied Arcais in tones more affable, but at the same time more offensive. "Let him tell his superiors that tiles keep falling here continually, and that I've had one of them land on my foot. And the best of health to them. I don't know a thing about any great-coats, and an end to that."

Heaven knows why it occurred to Filippo to ask permission to accompany Garlandi into the trenches. The captain, without looking at him, replied drily:

"We don't need tourists; and we don't need dilettanti."

His secret thus discovered, Rubè felt his skin itch with shame. But he shook off this uneasiness as soon as he was on the road leading back; now that he was alone he crawled rather than walked. Profiting by information given him by Garlandi, he found at Ronchi a motor car that was about to return, and he persuaded the chauffeur to hasten his departure and take him along. Night came upon them shortly after they passed the old boundary. Rarely had he known so complete a physical exultation. He was void of thoughts. The gates of the deserted villas shimmering in the light of the new moon promised fleeting wonders. He felt himself roll along, and it seemed that his soul was as revolving and as full of warm air as the tires.

Shortly after they passed Mareno this joy ceased. The chauffeur told him without warning that he was short of gasoline and that he would have to go back to Mareno in the morning for a new supply. Then Filippo got down and made the rest of the road on foot. He was numb, famished, empty.

The false light of the low moon in the west made him afraid that he might not recognise the villa, and he imagined himself a sleepless wanderer, upset, his face bleeding, blundering along to the dreary edge of the swamp. Wherefore he kept close to the wall, looking well at every sign, all the more carefully since he no longer had an exact recollection of the vicinity. A few barks from a dog struck him as of ill omen.

The silence was pierced by a repellent falsetto, as by an awl.

"Hi, there, my fine lieutenant, come sleep with me."

He turned with a start and beheld a drunkard who, staggering from one side of the road to the other, was approaching him with arms extended. Then the knot that all day long he had tightened about his will went suddenly loose, and he felt all the terror repressed during the previous thirteen hours burst forth like a cataract.

"If you take another step forward," he said, clamping his teeth together with all the strength that was left in him, "I'll shoot you down."

"Damn!" replied the other with a belch. "If I thought I would offend the master I wouldn't have spoken. I thought you were out on a—forbidden hunt. A fellow can't joke any more. . . ." Here he let out a volley of curses. "Instead . . ." and here he cursed again, "the officer makes war against the poor working-folk. Euhhh!" he concluded, with the long wail of a most reasonable creature who has been offended in his good sense.

He tottered and was forced to embrace a plane-tree lest he step forward and thus endanger his life.

Thus Filippo, in a cold sweat with the difficulty of seeking the lock, managed to open the gate. But he could not locate the light switch nor any matches in his pockets, and he groped his way upstairs, bumping against a bench. The snoring of Major Berti, which filled the house with the seething of a boiler, changed timbre.

He could not have said, afterwards, whether he opened Eugenia's door instead of his own out of sheer inadvertence, confusion, because of the darkness, or whether he had so desired it. When he had opened, he paused suddenly, and felt his heart throbbing as if it would burst. The light went on, revealing him in this posture.

He must have looked like a ghost, for Eugenia, without moderating her voice or thinking of the place or the hour, bounded to the edge of the bed, touched the floor with one foot, wrung her hands and exclaimed in a tumult:

"What's the matter? What's happened? My God! Have you been wounded?"

He divined her thought and it stiffened his courage. He came forward.

"No, no, it isn't what you think. I don't want it. Yes, I've been wounded. Nothing much."

"But then," she insisted, drawing the covers over her bosom, "why such a horrible face? Why here? What's happened? Tell me."

He managed to utter the wonted words:

"It's been a hot but stupendous day."

The thought of Rametta recurred to him, disappearing like a flash.

"I have been . . ." he added, but he could not say how. "I have been like all the others."

"Better than the others," he concluded. And he raised his eyes anew to the woman. The neatly ordered room was fragrant with the modest odour of cologne and soap, but he, instead, scented the dry, delicate acridness of youthful down. He was now beside the bed, with one elbow leaning upon the pillow.

Encountering his eyes, Eugenia saw that the terror had set in them and that something at once softer, yet more sinister had risen. She huddled herself together, with her heart in her throat, at the other end of the bed and fumbled for words:

"Do you wish to be treated?"

"I wish to be kissed," he replied, with a softness that betrayed the lurking violence.

She obeyed, raising her right hand to keep him at a short distance. But this gesture revealed anew a shoulder, frail but splendorous as the wing of a swan.

"Why do you kiss me as if I were a corpse? I am quiveringly alive and I love you."

Then in anxiety she closed her eyes and all her life, from the earliest childhood days, passed dizzyingly before her, as if she lay in the final agony. He had already placed both of his hands upon her shoulders.

He returned to his room shortly before daybreak, with wolf-

like steps. He held close to his chest his uniform, his spurred boots, the cravat on which the congealed perspiration had left yellowish-brown streaks. As he passed before the mirror and saw himself in this likeness, no comical thoughts occurred to him. Rather he saw in himself a resemblance to some robber with his bundle of booty.

For this very reason he at once put out the light, so that he should not give the matter thought, and that he might feel only his bruised, weary flesh, which was as odorous as the soil directly after rain. He sank into a dark, sound sleep which lasted almost until noon.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

A FEW weeks after Filippo succeeded in being assigned to the Alpine troops, he was sent to the front lines in Cadore. Berti, too, now a lieutenant-colonel, was at the head of a division before Gorizia, and Eugenia had gone as a nurse to Udine. "We have all been mobilised," wrote Eugenia to her friend, and in the same letter she added, in passing, that Federico was a medical captain at Bologna and that Mary had preceded him as a nurse, likewise at Udine. "They were married," she continued, still writing in passing on to the second and third page, "as we know, without any ceremonies. The wife is serene, and says that now they are in the current and don't suffer from the dizziness that one experiences as one watches the stream flow by from the banks." Irritated by the trouble he had gone through to decipher the writing intercalated between the lines of the letter that was already closely packed enough, Filippo crumpled the sheet, rolled it into a ball and was about to throw it into the valley. Instead, however, he thrust it as it was into his pocket, and industriously lighted the pipe that he had learned to smoke since entering the trenches.

"We've come to it," he said to himself, softly.

We've come to it; that is, he could now see rising to the surface of his soul a wave of hostility that up to then he had only heard stirring in the dark, trying his best to conceal it and not give it a name. Rather he had tried to comfort himself as a lover, writing daily a letter as detailed as a diary, and summoning, whenever life or courage were in danger, the image of his beloved. But strangely enough, he succeeded so ill if, to the generic figure of a stately, white, subtle woman with her inclined face scarcely lit up by a smile, he attempted to add more exact lineaments! Just how did the arches of her eyebrows run,—so delicate yet so strong? And the hollow of her neck, deep to the touch yet so softly hued that the

eye hardly distinguished it? He would vex himself with rummaging in his recollections, until the lines grew confused, and he felt that, even should he discover the face he sought, he would not recognise it. But wasn't it the same with every other thing in his life? Even the landscape that for so many days had been lying immutable before his eyes,—if he were to shut his eyes and try to reconstruct it in his mind, it would dissolve in the ardent tones of the woodpeckers and the funereal blackness of the forests. Not a crest, not a curve would he have been able to individualise, unless he should go back to it the next day and look at it with his eyes wide open, or even resort to the aid of maps. Even the depression of the Calinni Valley faded from his memory, and he himself, with all the burden of his duties and his feelings, was but a wave amongst waves, already changed in the moment he was illuminated by consciousness. At times, before falling asleep, the futile effort to recall oppressed him like an insupportable weight. He asked himself whether this imprecision of his memory might not be the cause of his inadaptability to happiness, of his constant detached and sated feeling. He invoked the solace of dreams, where the true and the false smiled upon him with like faces.

"We've come to it," he repeated. "I don't love her. If I did, I could recall her looks."

Then, considering the tie that bound him to this woman, he felt tortured as if by handcuffs. The trenches, his captain, his colleagues, appeared to him as liberty itself.

He formulated mentally his reply to her letter: "It is too bad that neither you nor I are of the kind that can witness great spectacles from de luxe seats. Otherwise you would be, as you are, a nurse at Udine, and I should be a captain somewhat higher up. We should own country houses and have bank deposits. We should have been able to be married already. Instead, I'm a poor sub-lieutenant, and I watch the show from the gallery, when I don't have to get down on to the stage."

But that is not what he wrote. Indeed, for a few days he did not write at all—and this was the first time he had failed to do so—but kept ruminating over new forms of sar-

donic letters, concisely offensive or friendly and suffering. He did not set these down. At last a short letter suggested itself ready made to him, written in spurts, a fulsome glorification of the wild war life, in which the unceasing call of danger relieves the soul of the pressure of to-morrow and brings understanding of pure happiness, the fresh joy of the huntsman. "The mere recollection of peace-time life gives us a headache, like the swamp air inhaled after an excursion into the Alps."

Udine, November 15th.

"I have learned from others, rather than from yourself, dear Pippo, what sort of life it is you're leading. Lieutenant Martinenghi stopped over here between trains, on his way to winter leave, and brought me your greetings as he had promised you. Mary was also over to take tea with me, and there wasn't any decent way of getting rid of her. So that it seemed as if I were forced to share what belongs to me alone: my love for you and my pride in you. I was fearfully put out, though I am really fond of Mary, as you know. But, patience!

"Martinenghi says that you're the most brilliant and the rashest officer in the whole zone, and that at times, when he sees you standing erect with your field-glasses close to your eyes, while all the rest have sought hiding, one would imagine that your sole purpose was to expedite yourself to your Creator. He has been brought up for a bronze medal, but he says that you deserve two silver ones, and that you'd have them if you knew how to approach your superiors with a little less timidity and a little less pride,—which are the same thing, when you come to think of it. Brave youth, frank, simple, excellent companion,—at least, that's how he impressed me. But I couldn't help shivering when I heard him talk like that.

"And what a strange letter that last one of yours was, my love! That queer request, in the post-script, for me to send you a sketch to help you recall that vein of mine which runs from the left shoulder, and so on. My dear boy, it's exactly where you left it, and it's all yours, like everything

else. You'll find it there when you return. Oh! I'm not like certain mothers and sisters, who, if you'd listen to all their nonsense, God forgive them, seem to wish for nothing but the gold medal and their glorious dead in the house. I know it's not as they say, but then, they ought to talk a bit more humanly, more prudently. As for me . . . why, my patriotism has its limits, and at certain times I say to myself, as was said in former days, *we poor women.*

"For example (but promise me that you won't take it amiss), Martinenghi's visit has put it into my head that you, too, if you wished, might obtain winter leave. You don't want to. I'm speaking in all seriousness, understand? You mustn't get angry and make me sorry for having spoken to you from my heart, which is the one happiness that is left me. I don't know, but in your last letter it seemed to me that between the lines I could detect malevolence, or at least—the word is too coarse—ill humour. Swamp air, the handcuffs of peace-time life, the wild freedom of war, and all that. A fine freedom, by the way! But who is it that locks these handcuffs about your wrists? Oh! Do me that justice, anyway. I have never even discussed the reasons, all of them economic, for your having postponed our marriage to six months after peace is declared. Tell the truth. I asked nothing, nor do I ask it now. If I had the choice to make over again, I would do the same as I have done for you, and I would do it deliberately, offering myself as a gift without leaving in you the impression of having yielded through weakness or through surprise. Then, perhaps, you would be more content with me, and you would like me more.

"Poor, dear love of mine, so brave, so noble of heart and so tormented. Lord knows why! Folks always praise you and say: But why that conspirator's mien? I know, even without your having told me, that I'm no miracle of intelligence. But one thing I believe I understand, and that is, that you are destroying yourself with this constant probing of your soul with your intellect. Night and day you flood it with brilliant light, and you frighten that poor soul, you blind it, and nothing can be seen in it any longer, not even

yourself. I've read a few books myself, and I know that this is called introspection. But it strikes me as a vice. If we go about to analyse everything, even the good water of the Trevi will seem impossible to drink. I believe that your soul is filled with great powers, and that there'll be a deep need of men like you, but you mustn't waste your strength so.

"At Novesa, for example, I, who am nothing and am worthless, understood you from the first day better than you understood yourself. You had reached the point where you despised and hated yourself. On the other hand, I reasoned like this: where there is a shade there's also a tree, where there's smoke there's fire. Therefore, where there's sensibility there is also courage. I saw at once that there was so much depth and so much grief in you, and I loved you from those first days, although I did not realise it. I loved you with real love, not with charity, as you say when you want to be unkind to yourself and to me. Now you're exaggerating in the other direction. If I could tell you exactly what I think, I'd say that you impress me as one who contemplates his heroism and enjoys it like a new object just purchased at a beautiful shop. But no, my dear, it's part of you, in your blood, and it's something that belongs to your very nature. What shall I say to you, then? The fatherland would not be deserving of our love if it really asked such unreasoning sacrifices, mere sacrifice for sacrifice's sake. This eulogy that you deliver upon war for war's sake doesn't convince me. Oh! Give some thought to me, and if you really don't want to think of me, then think of yourself and your mother. But your feelings for your kin I haven't yet been able to fathom. They're so queer. They must have done you much evil without realising it, when you were a little boy.

"Perhaps it's wrong of me to have said these useless things. I don't know whether I'll send this letter to you or tear it into scraps. Perhaps I oughtn't to disturb this fresh hunter's joy of which you speak, and which, at all events, still is joy. But everybody's told me that I have never had a taste for joy. Pardon me if I can't resist the need to place this sheet into an envelope. What should I talk to you about if not

my heart and yours? Here there are only gauze, iodine, gossip, anxiety. As to news, very little that's worth anything. Papa is well at Lucinico, and from time to time inquires after you. Mary is perhaps the best nurse in the division; her eyes are always shining, and she shows no signs of hurt if her husband —who is not wild, as she says, about the epistolary genre— writes her very little from Bologna. That pair always manages to find life just and good.

"Dearest, dearest, if you only knew how happy I felt when I read the few tender words that you added to the letter after your signature! And how beautiful those mountains of yours must be that render war beautiful in your eyes, and from whose tops you look down upon us below! Years ago we dreamed of going on vacation there for a whole spring, and then it proved impossible. I hope, however, that there won't be too much war there in the winter, and that you'll have a warm fire in your hut, for I feel a wee bit ashamed when I think of my brave boy as I pass my hands over the burning hot radiators of the inn.

"Pippo, think of me down here in the plain, really far, far below you. An embrace from your

"Genia."

November 20.

"Dearest, I, too, know the saying of Federico's, that one must not examine the water of the Trevi with a microscope. But I examine nothing, I feel nothing, and you may feel certain that in the serene life of which I spoke to you there is no suggestion of despair. I tell you this for your own peace of mind.

"But neither must you imagine that my happiness depends upon the beauty of the landscape. I have never been much of a nature-lover, and whenever I've travelled I've had myself hoisted to the top of an observation hill, or have perpetrated the ascension of a belfry, just to view the panorama. View the panorama! Now there's a pretty rough way of consuming the landscape, of gulping down the drink without getting the taste of it. Even in this impulse I can recognise my con-

founded habit of going to the bottom of things, which amounts to about the same as gliding over life's surface without establishing real contact. He who really enjoys nature can remain for a couple of hours squatted behind a hedge, watching only the sun as it cuts through the leaves and listening only to the hum of a hornet. Here, thank the Lord, panoramic excursions are forbidden by the Austrians. And as to hornets and hedges,—there aren't any.

"So you'd like to know whether the landscape I behold is the kind that sends one into ecstasies; well, I shan't cheat you out of a little description. To say that the Dolomites are beautiful is too much and too little. Beauty for beauty, I prefer Frascati, and the Roman countryside as it is seen from the Rustica. As the autumn is still fair, on certain days there are white clouds that look like marble palaces suspended in the sky, and the crags take on the colour of travertin. One would imagine a ruined theatre, or a city of giants reduced to débris, in comparison with which Rome is but a village. But the snows of the valley, as white as fresh plaster, disturb my metaphor. In general I can't get a certain lugubrious and grotesque comparison out of my mind; these perpendicular rocks, bare, scraped, pierced, all gnawed over, look like the decayed teeth of a slain monster,—something huge and impotent that bares its gums to the sky and cannot bite it. During certain sunsets the teeth get red, as if the monster for a few moments had succeeded and was dripping blood from its gums. Brrr!

"As you see, the landscape has nothing to do with my happiness. Yet it has. There aren't any mountains like these; they don't seem to belong to this earth. One gets the feeling of having been transferred to another planet,—a cold, pink place,—where life was not able to persist, and where it is necessary, who knows why, to start it all over from the beginning. You may imagine how far are thoughts of war in this atmosphere, which is more remote, more bizarre, than that of the moon. Not only now, when almost no fighting is being done and when we're waiting for the great spring offensive that will take us at least to the Drava, but—let me tell

you—even when we were fighting, it required every morning an effort of the memory (a review of the lesson, as it were), to realise that this was really war, and to know why it was, what we wanted, who were our allies and who our enemies, what was justice, enduring peace, and all the rest. At least, for me. I have very little to say to my brothers in arms about these things, and I think they have a little dislike for me, because I know certain things that they, too, hold in their hearts but do not want to know.

"My ear is very sharp for the mountain sounds. I have never been really able to enjoy fully a mountain excursion, those few times that I went on one in the years gone by; it is true that the mooing of the cows gave me a great sense of stability, but the calling of the shepherds from hill to hill filled me with an indescribable inner torment. Here, if I can get off by myself for a moment, I don't hear any animal or human sounds, and only the stone speaks. At bottom, the shooting isn't so different from the bounding of the stones that leap from on high, and the cannonading sounds with the somewhat comical insolence of thunder out of a clear sky—when it happens to be clear. Martinenghi exaggerates; as for really genuine attacks, we've had only three. And you can take my word for it that when they were over, they seemed child's play to me,—like the stone battles and the races on the rocks that I used to engage in twenty years ago at Calinni. After the seriousness of the danger was past, I could no longer see the seriousness of the purpose.

"I see in all this anything but the inhuman sacrifices to the fatherland of which you speak. The fatherland, to which I am and remain most loyal, has little to do with this attitude. Unhappily, I cannot enter into a full explanation of what I mean, through fear that this letter may go astray and some unintended reader should misunderstand it. In short, here one lives (at least, I do) in a sphere even vaster than that of the fatherland. For example, I realise without any pangs that I am a failure; just as if it concerned another. What am I to do if I return from the war,—if I descend from the mountain to the plain? Can you picture the lawyer Fil-

ippo Rubè returning to the offices of the honourable Taramanna (the decorated ex-lieutenant of the Signal Corps), and then opening an office of his own and having himself elected deputy for Calinni, and Signora Rubè on her day at home? Not I. I can't picture these things. I understand that I lack the strength to carry out my ambitions. The war would never have come upon us if everybody, all men and all peoples, had had the sense to remain at their posts. Well, I belong to that most unhappy intellectual, provincial bourgeoisie, spoiled by the education of all or nothing, vitiated by the taste for definitive ascensions from which panoramas are contemplated. Our hands have no callouses; their tendons are weak; we can't grasp a spade or a shovel; all we can grasp is the void. If you only knew how I envy my soldiers who can handle their bayonets as if they were scythes or hatchets, and who break human flesh as they would break ice or earth! When things go well with them, it costs them but a little perspiration. Up to now, I've killed nobody, and with all my interventionism, I'm not sorry. I seem to be a beefsteak eater who holds the butcher's trade in horror.

"The more I think of it, the more I'm sure that this is no sort of letter to entrust to the mails. I'll find some one who'll carry it to you.

"As recompense, I'm ready to be slaughtered. For whom? For what? The Dolomites sometimes give me the impression of a sterile, deformed world that needs to be fertilised and remade. The depths of the valleys attract water, and there is a deeper depth, invisible, that demands blood; something unknown that requires to be pacified. When you think in such a manner, war becomes as good a way to die as any other, no more and no less. We here have no to-morrow,—we feel danger as the burden that carries the water down, as sleep that oppresses our eyelashes. I assure you that this manner of thinking can be very sweet.

"But I don't perform the braggart stunts of which Martinenghi accuses me. I'm too intellectual to learn the technique of rushing to shelter from the bullets, that's all. Perhaps some colleague may imagine that I'm looking for a kindly

wound, which is the most ingenious expedient for being withdrawn from the war with honour. But those things are lottery prizes. And I belong to the category of those who are lucky in love and unlucky at games. If the bullet for me has been moulded, it'll get me. In that case, dearest Genia, all that will be left for you is to feel a little more compassion for me, and to forget a sin for which I justly assumed full blame.

"Give my kindest regards to Signora Monti. Write me, but without replying to this effusion of mine, and without any lectures. It's no fault of mine that whoever draws near me is stung. Rather tell me all the news and gossip of Udine. With embraces,

"Filippo."

Eugenia was still holding the letter in her hands, and was looking through a corridor window into space.

"What a long letter!" exclaimed Mary, pausing. "What does he write? Oh, forgive me! How could I be so stupidly indiscreet?" And playfully she struck herself with her fist upon the forehead.

"It's from Rubè. He sends regards to you."

"See? Friends are better than husbands. I must be satisfied with a mere picture postcard from Federico, representing the Torre degli Asinelli. He must have bought a stock of them."

She was off with a laugh that was too loud, fairly running. Eugenia remained there, drumming her fingers upon the panes that were somewhat clouded with her breath. Afar, the snow upon the Alps shone livid long before the evening in a slate-coloured sky.

Filippo, however, on the day that he had written that letter, had been so satisfied with it that he could not help being boisterous at mess, uttering sentiments that seemed either false or mischievous to his companions. The captain had been called to Headquarters, so that the subaltern's repressed feelings had free play. Above all, he insisted upon demonstrating that the national and social causes of the war were

empty pretexts; that the war was being waged because the whole world was too crammed with life, and now felt itself invaded by a mania for annihilation (it was going through its quarter-hour of *cupio dissolvi,* he said); and that the real disaster was comprised by the physicians, the surgeons, the nurses, the stretcher-bearers, and their ilk. If they, the fighters, kept breaking up things and the nurses mended them and the surgeons put them together again, the whole business became a sort of Penelope's task inverted, and nothing was accomplished, and the war might go on forever. This was nonsense. It was hypocrisy. And he pounded his fist. And he drank.

One of the lieutenants smiled out of obliging complaisance. Fanelli, whom Filippo had here met again, kept him company in the drinking, interrupting the pauses of this stormy speech with a: "Good God, let us have a little fun, won't you?"

Only Massimo Ranieri de' Neri, whose eyes were as blue as a virgin's, and who had been eager to get back to the front with a wound that was still not fully healed and with a fever that sent his blood bounding every evening, grew as red as if he were being outraged, and finally burst out:

"It's not so. It's not so. You know that it isn't so. You're an Italian and a soldier, same as myself, and if you really thought as you pretend you couldn't lead your soldiers in battle."

"I lead them into battle whenever I please and must. But I know how they look at it."

Then coldly he did something that would have led to harsh consequences if any one had reported it to the captain. He called over a group of soldiers standing nearby, and asked:

"Who owns the Marmolada?"

The majority kept a guarded silence. One boastfully replied:

"It belongs to Vittorio Emanuele."

Another, a Sicilian shepherd, said:

"The mountain belongs to God and to the shepherds. But that mountain isn't good even for the sheep."

Only one could find the proper answer:

"The Marmolada is in Austrian hands; but we'll take it from them."

"And why?" asked Rubè.

The Alpine shepherd, encouraged by the glances of the other lieutenants, drew himself up stiffly and answered:

"Because we will."

When the soldiers had dispersed, the eyes of Massimo Ranieri had, without losing anything of their pride, become suppliant.

"Why do you wish to rob us of our faith, tell me? This life would become a thing unworthy."

Filippo, who was standing with his beaker in his hand, executed a half turn upon his heels, emptied the beaker, and shattered it to bits against a rock. Then he went off, smoking.

After a few minutes had passed Fanelli, the cheeriest fellow of the band, went up to him and asked:

"Rubè! Rubè, I say. Aren't we going to have a game to-day?"

"I'm not playing to-day. Play with the dead man."

The scene was not repeated, and there was no more talk of it. His companions forgave him because they considered him a bit queer, and, upon reflecting that he had been writing all morning and that he had drunk a mite too much, they attributed his actions to probable difficulties in love.

But between him and the others for a long time there was a barrier of ice, and it seemed that he had become a stranger in the company and in the batallion.

During the respites from fighting they all slept in a hut. For a little while, during the height of winter, Filippo was tortured almost periodically by a confused dream that would make him bound up in the middle of his cot, shouting:

"Shoot him! Shoot him!"

The first time, the heaviest sleeper of the company had growled: "Uff!" and had turned over; nothing further had happened. But once the cry of "Shoot him! Shoot him!" was so piercing that they were all awakened, distending their eyes in the darkness.

"Well, go ahead and shoot him," finally spoke up the kindly lieutenant Fanelli, "and an end to it. And for the good Lord's sake, let us have a bit of sleep."

That time even Massimo Ranieri laughed loudly.

For a while nothing was heard but the wind, which seemed to be mowing the rocks.

Thus passed the days and the nights.

CHAPTER II

Federico had not gone on a honeymoon; he had not left his mother, and had brought his wife to the Rustica. Their apartment consisted of four rooms in a row, ample and rather low, with floors and ceilings of wood, and the square windows opening upon the countryside. The furthest one was the bridal chamber; then came the study, the library and the parlour; but all the rooms bore a resemblance to one another because of the violet-blue tones of the Bokhara carpets, the old rose of the terra-cotta and tanagra collections, and the flowered stuffs that covered the low sofas. Naturally there was modern plateware in the drawing-room, and there were many books and surgical instruments in the study and the library, but the cases of terra-cotta and the dark-toned, shining carpets were ubiquitous, and even the bedroom was distinguished from the other rooms only by a somewhat ampler sofa upon which was spread a cover of changeable sky-blue velvet, figured with corn-ears, not very different from the tapestry in the drawing-room. Where free spaces were left between the books and the closets, there had been hung, without any too great concern about the light, several airy canvases of the modern schools; for the most part landscapes, with the exception of a pair of portraits and a Crucifixion by a Russian painter that was hung in the bridal chamber itself, but seemed to have landed there by sheer accident; for the rest, it was not at the head of the bed. All this seeming confusion was dominated by a tenacious, unifying spirit that was apparent everywhere, and the careless luxury was the sign of a solid wealth, well rooted in the soil, so much so that as one walked over the carpets one could feel the rough parquetry creak from time to time, and almost perceive, beyond the scent of youthful woman that permeated the house, a dry aroma of the granary. The old Signora Monti inhabited the other wing of the house, nearer

to the Via Appia, busying herself in the morning with household duties and in the afternoon with Catholic modernism.

For four weeks life continued as it had always been, as if the marriage had taken place some years before and Mary had just come back to her home after a vacation. Even the pleasant Sundays were the same as of yore; friends and colleagues would come on extended visits; Bisi would often guide the conversation; and Federico would listen rather than participate. For Mary to serve tea was no novelty; and since both the season and the war were responsible for a diminution in the number of guests, Eugenia's assistance was not missed. Happiness, at the Rustica, wore a sober countenance and had the plain voice of the proprietress, so that it was no surprise to find it here. Just because joy there was a discreet and modest thing, sadness passed by the door without knocking; while nothing so attracts it as an insolent felicity. At least, so Signora Monti was in the habit of saying, as, from time to time, she would recall in exemplary serenity and with an ecstatic smile the death of her husband; although Giulio Monti had been rather young and could not strictly be considered a believer, except in the vague and not very consoling manner of the Mazzinians and the Masons.

Mary, beatific with love, did not consider that she had made much of an effort to accustom herself to this life (so little Italian, she said to herself, possessing in part the Anglo-Saxon notion of Italian life), and she was not perturbed if her mother-in-law regarded certain remaining exuberances of hers with the long and kindly glance the gardener raises toward the tree selected for pruning. It seemed to her that she had renounced all her whims with the same futile, passing tenderness with which, years before, she had had to renounce, after a family council, tresses and tassels. She only permitted herself now, when the dawn was clear, the pleasure of getting up ever so softly without waking her husband, and escaping through the little door that connected the bathroom with the garden and the vineyard. She was garbed only in her morning-gown and Turkish slippers, and in the late October mornings her teeth would chatter at the first contact with the

air. In the diaphanous mist she seemed darker than she really was, especially when, in order to avoid the dew, she raised her gown above her ankles, discovering a leg that was still as smooth and bare as a boy's. She had a fondness for picking sweet grapes as long as any were left, and figs, and for eating them as she picked, taking the rest in her palms to the bedroom, where she would wake her "little boy," whispering into his ear: "Freddy, Freddy, I've got something for you." The peasant who surprised her in one of these whimsical escapades, hurrying to hide lest he embarrass her, was the only one who knew how full she was of joy and what a sweet tooth she had. But nobody saw her black eyes, like those of a thieving little girl, so serious and so smiling, when, with bare arm clasping the trunk of the fig-tree, she tried with all her might to pull down the highest branch with the biggest fruit.

One Sunday evening, Federico, trying to appear as if he were carefully polishing his nails, called her into his study in his most casual, habitual manner.

"Mary!"

She came in with that rapid, dove-like rustle with which the fresh air always seems to enter.

"Do you know what Bisi's told me? That he's been called to service. I, too. We are assigned to Bologna. It isn't very far, I can have an opportunity for study there, and I think I can feel quite content."

She had suddenly sat down, resting her chin upon her fist, which glittered with a sapphire.

"Ah! But tell me"—and she did not raise her head, eyeing him from head to toe and blinking. "Summons, destination, and everything, all so unexpectedly, so quick?"

"Come, come!" he replied, scarcely brushing his hand over her hair, "it's understood that for some time I knew something was in the air, but there was no use in telling you until I was certain when and where. What's the good of hastening unpleasant news?"

"And . . . when?"

"Thursday."

"This Thursday?"

"This."

"There, Freddy. Now you see the trouble your silence has made. You know that I don't fancy going up there and doing nothing, just being bored to death in a hotel. Now, how am I going to manage, at three days' notice, even with my diploma and all, to have myself placed in Bologna? You might have let me know sooner. . . . Tell me, Freddy, do you think we can adjust matters immediately at Bologna? We will, easily, won't we? We know at least a half dozen influential men and women in the service there. Then it ought to be easy to find a place. After all, they all go where they wish to. At the worst, I'll be waiting for you at the inn."

Federico had stopped polishing his nails, and he repiied, without looking at her:

"You know that I don't want you to come along with me. I want you to keep my mother and your aunts company; I want . . ."

Seeing that his manner agitated her, he tried to treat her with more tact:

"Come, come, my beautiful gardener. There are still the pear marmalades to be made, and then that exquisite Byzantine curtain to finish. I want to find it across the library window when I return. And then, who can tell, perhaps there's something else hidden away, snuggling somewhere."

He held her cheeks between his too white, too large hands. He withdrew one to caress her side tenderly, but he saw that Mary's face was trembling, and suspecting that she was hostile to his plans, he withdrew both hands, suddenly arose and resumed his former voice:

"I'm disgusted by these family pilgrimages to the war, for example, Berti, his daughter, and his future son-in-law."

"Bologna is not the war."

"So much the better. So much the worse."

The inconclusiveness of his own answer added to his irritation.

"I don't open every window in my house for the mere reason that the wind is blowing, understand? If a gust of

the war carries me off, that's no reason why it should take my wife, my mother, and perhaps my child. I'm going now to Bologna. Within a month I'm likely to be shoved out even to Albania. What'll you do? Pack your baggage every other week? Does it strike you as decent, as possible, to drag out a new honeymoon and perhaps a pregnancy amidst hospital corridors and field hospitals?"

She made no reply. He stamped his foot.

"I detest these gipsy impulses, these manias for disorder that are on the watch for the first opportunity. No sooner do you hear the strains of a waltz than you want to dance. I say that war should be suffered by those who are forced into it. But my house, as long as the Lord permits it to stand, is not going to be demolished by my own hands. Understand?"

"What do I know of house or no house? I only know me and you. And it's my duty to follow you; my right, too."

She was swallowing her tears. Then he, who had now calmed down, said:

"Very well. Now let me work."

And he went back to the arrangement of his correspondence, turning his back to the open door, beyond which Mary was slowly undressing to the sounds of water and glasses. But he slept for the first time in the study, although he knew that Mary must have waited for him many hours, with her hand upon her beating heart.

The following morning he hovered about her, waiting to say or hear a word of peace. But nothing was said besides an exchange of "good-mornings," so that, when the time came to go down for breakfast, the woman seized him impetuously by the arm, shaking him to make him speak. The husband freed himself, and raising his forefinger, said:

"Has my little girl come to her senses? She's not going to Bologna."

His words chilled and offended her.

"Well. Not to Bologna."

Directly after breakfast she left the house and spent the entire afternoon and a great part of the next day away, tele-

phoning that they were not to expect her in time for dinner. She worked so diligently among her friends and acquaintances that she was able to have herself entered at once as a nurse in the Base Hospital at Udine. Not at Bologna; no. She did not wish to enter paradise against the will of the saints; but neither would she remain at Rome to make marmalades. Just why she had accepted Udine so readily she could not quite say. But she was glad to resume the companionship of Eugenia,—a companionship which now seemed to her as warm as a refuge, and she knew that Udine was the source of all the news, the centre of all powers, and that the name of the Montis was not unknown among the Catholic Liberals of the Supreme Command. Federico, as he himself foresaw, would not remain permanently at Bologna, and all roads led to Udine; in any event, at Udine she could perhaps hold at one end the thread of her husband's fate and unite it to her own. When, in her musings, she found nothing better, she would quiet herself with the thought that one thing gives birth to another.

Federico was informed by friends of his before she told him the news herself, and then he told his mother. On Tuesday evening after dinner she raised her eyes to her daughter-in-law, and without any preamble, declared:

"I am sure that your husband will prohibit you from indulging this madness."

Mary dashed down the stairs, and, stopping in the parlour, awaited Federico tremblingly. He rejoined her almost at once.

"I am your wife. Protect me. You must protect me against any one. If not, then I'll really commit something mad. I don't want to be insulted, oppressed. You'll never, never find me again."

He felt a little fear and a little pity for her, and let her do as she pleased; so much so, indeed, that on Thursday evening they left together and travelled in the same compartment. She slept but little and heard anguishingly the deep breathing of her husband, so near to her and yet so far. In the very middle of the night she dressed herself, even with hat and veil, and remained seated upon her bed.

"What are you doing?" asked Federico from the upper berth.

"Nothing, nothing. Did I wake you up too early?"

The train was now gliding into the plain. Dressing in his turn, he feared and yet hoped that Mary might wish to remain with him in Bologna. He prepared his words of fleeting reproach and weary acceptance. But, when they began to hear the rumble of the platform, they helped each other to distinguish those valises that had to be taken down from those which were to continue; and their good-bye was very quick. She ran to the window, and her lips had already framed the words: "Freddy, shall I go along with you?" But the window resisted too long her efforts to open it. She saw him disappear in the distance, behind another train that had come to a stop,—tall and straight as a laurel, the only really determined and wide-awake person (so it seemed to her) in that lamentable chaos, where the last nocturnal hour lay putrefying in the squalor of the rainy atmosphere shot through with the gleam of the arc-light, and in the confusion of voices from travellers, soldiers, porters, blended of sleep and anger a miniature humanity, upon whose features a smile would have seemed unnatural.

He stopped at the station restaurant and drank a coffee and milk. The thick, insipid odour of the mixture, the yellow atmosphere, the muddy tracks left by the passers-by, the vacuous faces of the waiters who were carrying drinks to the customers as if it were soup to prisoners,—everything was unbearable. Although it was not his habit to concern himself with the affairs of others, he scrutinised one by one the faces of the travellers seated about the surrounding tables. How ugly! With what looks they guarded their valises! One would have thought that they carried inside deadly or inconfessible secrets. He himself, for the first time in his life, felt ugly and upset. He was sure that, were he to look into a mirror, his face would seem as hard as a closed fist. Why had he let his wife go thus? (Here his thoughts were interrupted by the banging of hammers and the shouts of the guards. Too late, in any case.) How different all this wretchedness would seem if she were now sitting opposite him,

somewhat confused with sleep, with her lips half open, like those of a drowsy baby,—she, the only smiling face, perhaps, in all that forced assembly! And what idiotic cruelty—yes, idiotic—was that of his mother, who had not even accompanied them to the station, pleading a headache, but really in protest against her son's "weakness"! What joke was this? And what could the three of them be thinking about? Joke! This was war. He had shut his doors and windows so that his possessions should be sheltered from the storm, but here was the flood seeping in through a crack and treacherously inundating the house. Within the space of a single day an industrious, harmonious structure that had lasted decades, a century, was crumbling; the wife was turning her back upon her husband; the mother, upon her son; the rosebushes that clambered up to the balcony had become infested with lice, the books were covered with dust, the serenity of his thoughts was leaving him, the succession of the hours, hitherto as rhythmic as a dance, was becoming confused and anxious as the bustling crowd upon a station platform. And that nauseous odour of the coffee and milk, fit only for the flies! His cup was still half full, and a wrinkled scum covered the muddy surface.

"Ah, no!" he said to himself, without inquiring into either the sense or the application of such defiance.

And, just before leaving, when he was about to pay, he called out: "Waiter! Porter!" in an imperious voice that made everybody turn around, so strangely disproportionate was it to the purpose.

He had no great clinical experience, as he had preferred to study with the books and the instruments that he had at home, tending with all the strength of his curiosity toward biological research. But his knowledge was extensive and exact, his hand firm, his judgment cautious, his resistance to hard work fairly exceptional. In a short while he had attained leadership among his colleagues. He was also aided by a courtesy that never descended to fawning upon his superiors or to intimate confidences among his equals; his devotion to the patients was devoid of sentimentalism. The impeccability of

his life was tempered by an indulgent smile, and his opinions upon the war were wrapped in silence. His conduct was commonly defined as "perfect," and he himself was not astonished at the increasing ardour with which he attended to his duties. Gradually his hours of leisure grew less in number, and his face, altered by the sparse blond moustache that he was allowing to grow, seemed to grow sharper beneath the ever widening forehead. Soon Bisi was able to have himself sent back to Rome to establish a section for soldiers mentally affected, and he suggested that Federico should employ the same influence as he had to effect the transfer. He refused. He wrote regularly but little to his mother and to his wife; the correspondence with his mother became little by little more abundant, because she found the way to his heart by sending him a detailed account of all the domestic affairs, asking his advice, now as to the dismissal of a hand, now as to the pruning of a pear-tree, the installation of a majolica range, or the purchase of an Atlas. Mary, on the other hand, wrote him a sort of hospital and city diary, with an excess of spirits that tried, through timid pride, to conceal the grief of distance and the pangs of separation, receiving in return for this cards or short notes but a few lines long, in that round, calligraphic hand of his, signed invariably "Federico," though she always began with "Dear Freddy," or "Dearest Freddy," or, what was sweetest of all, simply "Freddy."

Neither could write the word or undertake the short journey that the other was waiting for. But Federico counted the weeks and months. There could no longer be any doubt that she was pregnant, and sooner or later she would have to cease concealing it and think of going back. Already he gloated over that inevitable victory (when? in April at the latest; or, if he must allow for Mary's stubbornness, no later than the end of May), and already he could see his wife's arms around his neck as she mutely begged his forgiveness. "Now," he said to himself, "she'll no longer play the mischievous baby; she must be the mother." And as he thought these things, he blushed with the modesty of the chaste.

Toward the middle of April his hospital was placed in a critical condition. Several physicians, removed by illness or by transfer, had left Bologna, when a sudden influx of wounded from the front filled every ward of the hospital. Federico was plunged into an excitement of activity that, to any one who recalled his life at Rome, would have seemed utterly irregular and even somewhat mad. He was fascinated, among other things, by the case of an epileptic who the colonel thought was pretending, but who he thought was genuine enough.

"Let's send him to Bisi for a decision," he once proposed, laughing. But he was only jesting, and wished himself to solve the puzzle.

For two nights in succession he was unable to get a comfortable sleep, and he stretched himself, all dressed, upon a leather couch, with a cover over his knees. But the third night he could stand it no longer, and he climbed the stairs to his room with a slight pain in his joints, as if they had become affected with rheumatism. It required an effort to undress. "That's how old age must feel," he said to himself. As he unclasped the puttee of his right foot it seemed to him that his leg was less sensitive than usual, or actually deadened, in a part near his tibia. When he had bared it he could not repress an *oh!* There was a spot almost elliptical in shape, as large as an egg. The uncertain light of the electric globe, which was covered with a flowered shade, prevented him from making sure as to the colour, but he thought he could detect blue tints mixed with yellow. A strange shudder ran up his left arm.

"What can it be?" he said to himself, gazing into the mirror at his image, which was wan from lack of sleep, as if he had an interlocutor before him. "What can it be? I remember perfectly well that yesterday morning I banged my shin against one of the bed-posts, while I was standing aside to let an assistant pass with a tray. The patient was frightened by the impact and turned away. I knew very well that I'd find a mark. I guess it would be well to rub it with alcohol, because it hurts. A little. Though I can't say it really does

hurt. Oh, enough of these horrible physicians' psychoses; reminds me of when I was a student; I'd have become a ridiculous good-for-nothing if my mother hadn't given me a bawling out. And now, just because I've been handling some gangrene patients and a few frozen victims, I imagine I have gangrene. Gangrene! Let's be done with this!"

Then he became aware of the self that he saw in the mirror, with his sparse, unkempt hair, his countenance furrowed by fatigue and fright, coatless, with one leg bare, a garment and a knee in his hands.

"Federico, you're a funny sight," he said. And he tried to smile.

Surely enough he did not dare to rub the spot, nor even touch it, through fear of finding it insensitive and cold, and of striking against the rotten bone. He donned his pajamas cautiously, so as not to feel the impact of the cloth against the affected area. He turned the lights out at once.

"I'm dead tired. I'll fall asleep in a jiffy."

"And then," he added, as if pursuing the negative reasoning of before, "a gangrenous spot hasn't that rosy-violet border. Rose and violet,—poetic colours. Unless this damned electric light has made me colour blind, it's the colour of cylamen, or of Mary's lips when she's cold. But I must have been colour blind. A fellow can't work so hard without going crazy. *In medio stat virtus.*"

He laughed out loud at this commonplace quotation, and drew back under the covers the finger that was about to press the bell desperately. He turned over on his stomach, leaning his leg with all its weight upon the bed. The flesh near the tibia felt neither the pajamas nor the cover nor the mattress nor anything. It was as if isolated in a void.

"I'm feverish. I'm asleep. I'm dreaming."

He dreamed of a schoolmate of his, a pale, somewhat dissipated fellow, who years before had come to him to learn whether he had, as he feared, a case of syphilis. He had made an accurate examination of the symptoms, and then, looking the fellow squarely in the eye, had pronounced but a single syllable:

"Est."

Why that cold, pitiless sentence? And why in Latin? He could not explain this to himself in the dream, and kept repeating *est, est.*

He awoke at daybreak, and bounded up in the middle of the bed.

"It's all a silly dream."

But he came to his senses at once, feeling a sort of gap in part of his body. He sought the spot and stared at it with eyes distended. It did not seem to have grown, but it had become accentuated. Or was this yet another hallucination? Feverishly he grasped a pencil and traced a line around the infection, which in the morning light seemed rather more whitish, with the intention of measuring its extension that night. Then he dressed in great haste. A flash that passed in front of his eyes warned him that he was losing control of himself. He recalled, indeed, that he had come to an ineluctable decision: to say nothing to anybody, to go to Udine as soon as possible, perhaps not to-day, but certainly to-morrow. Something deep down told him that he was acting madly; but he could not do otherwise. He tried to consolidate his wandering wits by repeating his motto: "Nothing and nobody can do me harm. I alone have the power to harm myself."

"Your faith," his mother used to object whenever he spoke like this,—and she would look at him through her tortoise-shell glasses—"is strong but impious. Unless you mean to refuse the name of evil to that which may be sent to you by God or man, and give that name only to what comes from an evil conscience. Then you are right."

For the whole of that day he tried to act as if nothing were the matter, but he could not prevent a veil of distraction from being drawn now and then across his countenance, nor could he resist the need of leaning against the furniture or taking a seat. Without knowing why, he kept his secret to himself; and whenever he met the colonel he would avoid his glance, and did not request the leave he needed. He asked himself what sort of fate had become his master; who or what

prohibited him from doing what a physician, or any sensible person, would have been in duty bound to do from the first moment. Within his breast he felt a torrential soul without dykes or barriers. Toward evening he became restless, and fearing that he might not be able to find the colonel, went to his office and knocked.

"It's absolutely necessary for me to go to my wife at Udine. A letter I've received . . . I beg you to grant me a short leave."

"Right now, when we need you so badly? You didn't want to go when I offered you leave. . . ."

"That's just it," he insisted, drawing himself with the greatest effort to the position of salute. "So you can see that I would not ask for it if it were possible to do without."

Only then did the colonel notice the quivering of Federico's mouth and his overwrought features; he imagined who knows what sort of family drama.

"Very well, you may go. I'll give you four days, a week. Enough? Yes? And take a good rest; divert yourself. You're not very well, my dear Monti."

A single thought now filled Federico; to avoid unclasping his puttee at all costs; not to look at his leg, but to leave as soon as possible for Udine, but not so soon as to arrive at Udine before the morning was advanced. The solitude of the unfamiliar city would have filled him with horror. Part of the night he spent stretched out on the couch, trying in vain to read the *Imitation of Christ* which his mother had placed in his bag; the other part he passed at the station café, reading scrupulously the newspapers of the previous day and meditating passionately upon the probable strategic purposes of the approaching offensive. He had a walking stick that he had procured from a servant, pleading a bruise received from a bump against a bed.

"I'm not going to Udine for my wife," he said to himself resolutely, after he had boarded the train. "I'm going in search of Professor Pierantoni, who's very fond of me and who is the foremost surgeon in Italy."

The first-class compartment was neglected and somewhat

filthy. Opposite him sat a young, weakly woman, garbed in black wool; she kept raising a phial of smelling salts to her nose. For a long time he paid no attention to this. They had already reached the Venetian plain when suddenly it occurred to him:

"It's because of me; I smell bad."

Leaning upon his cane, he made his way to the toilet and unclasped his puttee. The spot had invaded his calf. His terror was but a momentary recognition. He gathered all his strength, like a swimmer in a suffocating wave, and pronounced in a loud, firm voice that was swallowed up by the murmur of the train:

"Est."

At that moment his attention was attracted to a plane-tree that he saw fly past the window. Its trunk was round and leprous, yet the branches were burgeoning under the caress of spring.

"If the plane-tree could see my dead bark and my living soul, I should produce the same effect upon it."

This absurd reflection calmed him.

At Udine, in the hospital yard, Eugenia was the first to see him. She did not even greet him, but ran inside, crying in her white voice:

"Mary! Mary! Your husband."

His wracked countenance froze both the women. He said nothing. He pressed Eugenia's hand, and kissed Mary's. Mary's abdomen was already curved, and her eyes were infinitely tender, as if the pupils had invaded the irises. Somewhat later, Professor Pierantoni informed them that there was nothing to do but amputate the leg above the knee.

When everything was in readiness for the operation, Mary in broken words asked permission of the surgeon to be present and aid. Pierantoni measured her with his cold, steely glance that brooked no resistance. Federico did not turn to look at her.

Despite this refusal, she managed to get back to the corridor and eavesdrop behind the door, pressing her hand over her heart.

"He wouldn't even take anæsthetics," she said to herself. "How like him that is! He certainly won't utter a groan. But it's horrible that they should have permitted poor Eugenia to be present. What do physicians understand?"

Then she repeated meaningless words to her heart:

"He was as straight as a laurel. Oh, Lord, how I love him, the poor, poor boy!"

Suddenly there was a howl that seemed as if to burst through the door,—an *uuuhhh* emitted with such a volume of sinister breath that it seemed impossible for a human bosom to contain it all,—black, like the wail of a tortured wild beast who weeps as naturally as the wind blows, invoking neither remission nor pity. Stiff against the door-jamb, she replied to it with a sharp groan, as long as the first, withdrawing her breath into her innermost depths.

The next day, when they were left alone for a brief while, she kissed him upon the forehead and then upon the lips.

"Enough," he said, waving his left hand as if to drive off a bother. "It isn't worth the trouble."

These things, at least those that she knew and had seen, Eugenia told to Filippo in a long letter, entrusting the missive to an officer in the Alpine division who was going to that sector. But Filippo did not receive it, because his division had been suddenly transferred to the Altipiano, where it took part in the battle of May. Later he used to repeat that those days were incomparably the best in his life. During the bombardments he experienced a particular unhappiness, but it was so poignant that it resembled a rare intoxication. It would seem as if his entire body was a vast head cleaved in every direction with the stabs of headache, and as if, in that head there were no brain but only a palpitating heart. Then came hours of supreme serenity, as if ether instead of blood flowed in his veins and his feet weighed nothing.

He was wounded in an attack. He was going forward with his orderly, Diodato Forella, at his side. Through the verdure he made out the mouth of a light artillery cannon, and the tow-headed gunner who was manning it. He needed but to

raise his gun to kill him. But killing was not his affair, and in a moment he felt his forearm strangely weak and heavy.

"Shoot him! Diodato! Shoot him!"

But while Diodato was looking about, Filippo felt a blow and fell back into the arms of his orderly, without completely losing consciousness. The projectile had pierced a lung, but the wound, limited and not poisonous, was not malignant, though serious. The resistance of an organism tried by illnesses of the imagination and the nerves rather than by anything else, produced rare results within a few days. Eugenia learned of the battle somewhat late, and difficulties of every sort, increased by the embarrassed position which she occupied in "the eyes of the world," and by what she "would have to tell to papa," prevented her from hastening to the field hospital. She suffered. But there was a great to-do, especially through friendly influences at work in the Supreme Command, and she succeeded in having Filippo transferred to Udine as soon as the physicians gave their consent.

He reached there on the last day of May. It could be seen that he was radiantly happy in the soft swaying of the litter. The two women greeted him more with their glances than with any words. Eugenia restrained her tears; Mary was so dispirited, and so sinister a light burned in her eyes, that it amazed him to think how she could be so disheartened when all danger was passed and his wound was not fatal. He looked at her longer than he did at Eugenia.

Wherefore Eugenia was somewhat slighted, though she did not say so, and tried in every way to be left alone with him.

"So? You haven't anything to tell me? Nothing to say to me? Are you tired?"

She held his hand in hers.

He smiled faintly.

"What's there to say? Here I am. Alive."

"But how did it happen? Just when? How were you wounded?"

"Exceedingly simple. I left for the assault in the conviction and with the desire that I should be wounded, and be wounded

'right.' As you see, I succeeded. It's inconfessible, but it's true."

His words were not kindly, but his smile, though weak, was more natural than it had ever been.

"And poor Mary, tell me?" he asked Eugenia.

"Eh?"

He knew nothing. She told him the story hastily, in a low voice and with laboured breathing.

"Ah!" was his comment. "Terrible!"

But his heart was not in the conventional words. It annoyed him that Eugenia should speak to him so soon about "the other man."

At this moment there came the discreet rap of a knuckle upon the door, and Mary's voice asked:

"May I come in? I'm not disturbing?"

She walked right in; and behind her, Federico, hobbling on a crutch.

"We meet again, at last, eh? Bravo, Filippo! Both of us sent back for repairs, eh? Bravo! Bravo! I'm so happy to see you again."

He spoke with an accent different from his former manner. It seemed to Filippo that his voice had become hoarser and that his smile, deep and forced, was fairly constructed against a framework of premature wrinkles, revealing decadence where once his adulators had found an unfailing grace worthy of a demigod. He glanced aside so as not to get too full a view of Federico's stump and the crutch, succeeding only with great difficulty.

The cripple clumped over to the bed, still speaking, and preceded by Mary, who was almost in the seventh month, with a somewhat undulant stomach. When Federico had come very near, Filippo rose in the bed so as to press his hand.

But his arm fell back. And when he gazed at his friend with a long stare that knitted his brows, he swooned for the first time, dropping his head back upon the pillows.

CHAPTER III

GRADUALLY they all forgathered again at Rome. The two Montis reached the city in the first week of June, and even from La Rustica they could hear that confused droning, similar to the hum of multitudinous insects swarming because of some unforeseen atmospheric disturbance, with which capitals reveal their cognisance of historic events or their activity in creating those selfsame events. Such a droning then accompanied in Rome the military crisis upon the Altipiani and the fall of the Salandra ministry. At the Monti home, where politics was the dominant theme, the aged Signora Adriana, who held concise, systematic opinions upon the questions of the day, was a regular visitor. At first she would hold her opinions strictly to herself, until she had discussed them and verified them with Father Mariani. This learned, liberal Silesian, who was even suspected of modernism, visited her a couple of times a week, avoiding only the Sunday gatherings, which were too mixed for him, and moreover, somewhat compromising and not a little embarrassing because of their correct elegance, before which he did not like to exhibit his frayed cowl and his bald pate. Concerning which and the ideas that seethed beneath it he was often wont to jest, saying that it is not the cowl that makes the monk, nor the pate that makes the brain; there was no way of getting out of him anything but some joke of the kind, with a childish reddening of the cheeks when they twitted him upon the neglected condition of his garb and the disorder of his desk, which were his only sins. The conversations between the woman and her counsellor could also become impetuous, but the pair always ended by coming to agreement, whereupon the opinions of Signora Adriana, thus tempered, would become official in the Monti home; nor was this so difficult an act of domination since Federico had left for Bologna, for Federico let his own

opinions fall rather carelessly without giving them too much weight. That is, if one could give the name opinion to such a manner of considering human affairs from aloft, with a quiet indulgence toward the unavailing efforts of those who would wish to divert the course of necessity.

But ever since the son had returned from Udine things had changed, and now he had definite opinions and defended them even against his mother. For example, the fall of Salandra appeared to his mother and her Sunday partisans as a just punishment for the words that he had dared to utter against Cadorna, and with the supreme head safe, she considered everything safe. Federico, however, thought that Salandra had deserved his fate, but for opposite reasons; and he would grow excited demonstrating with the utmost detail that the head of the government should have brought the head of the army before a war tribunal. It was queer to see him always dressed as a medical captain, with his right pantaloon cut and sewed up at the stump of the knee; hobbling upon his crutch like a crane on a single foot, and ready to unroll a geographical or a topographical map in order to illustrate, even to the movements of the regiments, the Trentino offensive and the "pretended" offensive of the Altipiani.

"But, I beg your pardon," once interrupted Mary, who as usual, was at the head of the veranda, sewing a baby's cap and rarely raising her eyes to the drily, loudly disputing group, "how can you say 'pretended,' when Filippo Rubè was nearly killed in it?"

The objection seemed facetious, and Federico, after having laughed at it together with his mother and the opposing side, continued his lecture. It could not have been imagined, a few months before, that he could have digested so meticulous and evasive a strategic science, or that he could get so excited computing the data that meant victory for the Entente, which he expected henceforth not so much through Russia as through the United States. The disaster of the *Lusitania,* he said, would rouse the United States from their neutrality; and he spoke of the incident without compassion, as if Lusitania were the name of a good card, and without realising that

Mary did not care to recall the depths of the Atlantic. His friends could not make him out at all, except perhaps the oculist Maroni, who had never been able to stand him, and who, no sooner had he closed the gate behind him, would say to a small group:

"Since he's deposited a leg in the war bank, now he wants the interest."

But these heated discussions served to divert Federico and his mother from the old and new cares that divided them. She had received notice of his misfortune while she was confined to bed with the regular attack of arthritis that came with the beginning of every spring, and at once, to her maternal grief and the torture of distance and inaction, there was added a jealous acridness with which she uselessly reproached herself when she spoke in private to the priest. In any case, Federico was wrong to have taken the train for Udine instead of Rome, and she could not purge herself of a certain animosity toward Mary. This she vented, now nodding her head before the curtain, which was too delicate for war times ("I should say, almost a doll's toy"), now looking straight out of her glasses and issuing precise orders in anticipation of the time "when Giulio will be born," or "when Giulio will be weaned," or "when Giulio begins to go to school." That the child would be a boy and that he would be christened with the name of his dead grandfather and live and grow up according to the grandmother's schedule, were dogmas that none would care to discuss. Her foresight cast its illumination upon the years and the decades yet to come, and the man that she had most esteemed, after her husband and before Father Mariani, was the German archeologist, Graefe, who, even when he was already in his decline, would each morning make up the programme for the day, and on the very day of his death had awaked asking his nurse and his attendant:

"What's the programme for to-day?"

She could not pardon her son his macabre habit of dressing like an officer, with his stump wrapped like a sausage in the shortened trouser-leg; even less could she countenance his negative, sarcastic, crazy attitude toward the more or less

explicit solicitations that were made to him to provide himself with a wooden leg. There were remarkable, jointed ones that served the selfsame purpose as a leg of flesh and blood.

"And they have also," Federico would add,—for he had in some incomprehensible way taken to making all manner of remarks in bad taste—"the advantage of not requiring care of the nails, nor begging your pardon, of growing corns."

"Orthopedic science," explained Bisi, when the family group would discuss the matter out of Federico's hearing, "made amazing progress during the past century. Mechanical legs with which one can even dance are spoken of in Dostoevsky's novels, and are attributed to a certain Cernosvitoff, who for the rest is unknown to me." (He had learned this from his wife, the friend of a Russian pianist.)

If it were possible to assuage a misfortune and diminish its consequences, Signora Adriana thought and said, why refuse? Federico's conduct seemed to her "unworthy of an educated man and a Christian." She wished to have Father Mariani talk to him about it in private, and that brave personage, swallowing his saliva, had scarcely begun:

"But why, my blessed son? . . ."

"Because *because!*" replied Federico. "Because, on the day of universal judgment and the resurrection of the flesh, I don't want to make a mistake. You will understand, your reverence, if I were to present myself through force of habit with a wooden leg, there'd be a scandal, wouldn't there?"

And he finished with a not very congenial laugh,—too thick and resounding, like that with which he had crowned a rather risky joke one evening when Mary, without a word, had hung her arms around his neck as he was preparing, as usual, to sleep upon his study couch. He thrust her without violence to one side, and placing a hand upon her shoulder said that love is a horse that needs four good legs for regular trotting, or something of the sort; fortunately, with so queer a sentence that his wife only half understood, and remained for a second to look at him, half dumbfounded.

"For the rest," he once said to his mother, so as to avoid

all further mention of the subject, "you, my wife, the servants,—you all lend an obsessive importance to that wretched leg, and when I come in you make an effort not to look where the knee used to be. As if I held it in hiding, out of spite. What the devil! A fellow can get along quite well this way, too. There are worse things than losing a leg."

"For example," retorted his mother in a voice so sharp that she herself, hearing it, felt she had overstepped the bounds, "losing one's head."

Filippo arrived in Rome in July and was assigned to the Kinesiterapico. The following month Colonel Berti was called to a post in the Ministry, and, accompanied by Eugenia, re-opened his city house on the Via Merulana, which was somewhat dark because of too many curtains.

"We," said the colonel to Filippo, "have done our duty. Now it's up to the other fellows to cook the soup. *Messieurs, faites vos jeux,* and let the wheel turn where it may."

The months spent by Filippo in hospital were lazy and peaceful. He was under hardly any other restrictions than those of attending meals and not going out nights, and later, when his lung was beyond danger and his cough had disappeared, even these rules were frequently overlooked. Idleness and solid food soon restored his lost weight, and not a trace of his past danger was visible except for an olive-hued brilliancy around the cheek-bones, by which the expression of his face was rendered noble, and at times a lost, fixed stare. His mother, who had no notion even of where Udine might be, and who had become so imbroiled in her affairs and preparations that she no longer had the time to visit him there, certainly had not imagined him thus when she broke into his room, followed by her daughter Sofia, shouting:

"My son! My son!"

Perhaps she had pictured him as maimed as the good Lord Jesus, or as emaciated as a paralytic. And here he was, instead, in better health than she could ever remember him to have known, and was not even suffering from dyspepsia, palpitation, and all those other devilish ailments that had plagued

him since adolescence. He permitted himself a vainglorious attitude, and said:

"Well, what of it? It's merely a matter of wearing a woolen undershirt so as not to catch pneumonia. What did you think?"

Lucietta had not come because her husband (a most jealous lover!) would not permit her to leave the house, even to step on to the balcony. Sofia kissed him simply upon the forehead, solemnly, saying:

"My brave brother!"

But she was genuinely stirred, thought Filippo. (And why not? he asked himself later, as he took account of the cold admission implied in his *but* and his *genuinely*.)

The two women remained in Rome for four days, going into ecstasies every ten minutes over that most beautiful of cities, whose streets ran up and down just like Calinni's, with a pavement of tiny tiles like the flint-stone of a little village. They often remarked that it must be very cold there in winter, and that without a doubt their friends one morning had found the butter frozen outside the window. Filippo took them on walks, avoiding the Via delle Convertite, the Piazza Venezia, the corner of Via Milano; not without reason, for his mother, with her coarse widow's crepe, and his sister, with her hat that had a turned-up, oppressive brim which weighed upon her hair, were both old-fashioned looking, and they both spoke at the same time in loud voices, stopping in the middle of the street. After he had offered them an ice, which they found less to their taste than the ices sold by Don Celidonio at Calinni during the three days' fair, he took them to a café in the Via Salaria, where, as he told them, they could procure the least bad meals in Rome. But the heavy expenditures were made, naturally, by the mother, who would extract the small notes one by one from her black leather purse with all her five fingers, as if she were pulling up trees by the root. Wherefore Filippo, after having arranged for them in a hostelry on the Via Principe Umberto, pleaded the disciplinary obligation of taking his meals at the Kinesiterapico, in order to avoid inviting or being invited.

One morning while his mother and his sister were waiting for him to button his coat, preparatory to taking them to see the Vatican, his mother discovered a photograph upon the bureau,—a lady dressed in white, leaning against her parasol. His son had not had time to shut it up in a drawer.

"Is this your betrothed? And you never said a word about it to your mother? Foreigner, it seems?"

"Why, what are you talking about?" answered Filippo, at a loss for words, and angry. "It's a friend."

"Look out, my son. Take care."

Another time she asked:

"And when are you coming to Calinni?"

"Oh, as soon as I leave the hospital."

"Now see here, if you want to be elected deputy"—here he became attentive—"you must come soon, for Enrico Stao is turning things upside down, and he's shouting that after the war the peasants will all be Socialists. Do you know what that busybody says? That you received a trifling wound and that you did it out of political ambition. Ah! If only your poor father were alive! For your sister's husband is too busy thinking of his own affairs."

Sofia thought, on the other hand, that before coming to Calinni he had better wait till he was promoted to a captaincy, and received the silver medal, since both of these projects were on the way to fulfilment. It would produce a greater effect.

"Stay here a few days longer," said Filippo, without looking them straight in the eyes.

"I can't, my dear son. This journey cost me, together with the return tickets, five hundred lire. And I have to bring back some little gift for Lucietta."

He accompanied them to the station. Up to the very last moment his mother kept repeating, with tears in her eyes:

"Don't go back to the war, Filì. You mustn't break your mother's heart. I've promised four pounds of wax and three masses to the Addolorata for the miracle that she performed for me."

It seemed to him that his mother ought rather to see to saving the two hundred lire per month that he needed again,

now that he was at Rome; at the same time he realised the harshness of his thoughts, worthy of a "heartless son." But not on this account did he change his attitude. For a brief period he had not been inspecting himself so relentlessly, and had even conceived a greater sympathy for himself. "It may be that I've not much heart, but what counts, in addition to a brain, is the liver." His sweetest manner of falling asleep at night was to compare the tremendous impressions of his early days with the courage (now suspended, abandoned, like swimming on one's back in a calm sea) of life in the trenches and in battle. The echoing recollection of the cannon's roar and the shell's explosion cradled him, made his mattress softer, as the strains of music from the distant square close the eyes of children in their dark rooms on holiday nights. He spoke with less vehemence, and as he walked along, with every step he felt the pleasure of leaving and resuming contact with the ground. "The war," he said at a table with his three habitual companions, who but half understood what he was talking about, "will cure the world, for it will cauterise scrupulous and sick consciences. Smiling to himself, he would imagine that the shot from the cannon, perforating his thorax, had found in its flight that damp, weak conscience of his, suppurating with remorse and fear, and had dried and burned it. Physical health became to him one with moral health, and the new blood flowed in his veins and vivified every fibre like spring water among the grasses. He enjoyed the best hours of late morning and afternoon in pleasant company; he sat lazily around the café; he argued volubly in the editorial offices of the newspapers; he would visit houses, and now, as before, he preferred the home of the honourable Taramanna, who, from time to time, amidst his political and professional duties, would take a run out to Udine, to Cormons, and, in late August, even as far as Gorizia, in his capacity as lieutenant in the Signal Corps, with a bronze medal. But Filippo at bottom was not deeply interested in politics, and not at all in his profession. He was not so positive, and in a manner indifferent, as to the outcome of the war, and in the fashion of the combatants, he affected a

certain indulgence toward, even a sympathy for, the slackers. To Taramanna, who was upon the road to an undersecretaryship, he said:

"With all those mush-heads that we have at the head of the government, we ought to plunge head-first into defeat. But we'll win just the same."

And Taramanna, looking at him out of the corner of his eyes:

"What's that? Do you mean to run as an opposition candidate?"

But Filippo was thinking neither of programme nor of propaganda, for he felt the odour of his new robustness rise almost to his nostrils, like a sound animal with a lustrous hide; now it seemed to him that everything would come out perfectly right for him at the proper moment. Only, at the end of the month, he would be bothered by the thought of the two hundred lire that he was costing his mother; but he had already considered renouncing this stipend for the second time, though as a sacrifice, as soon as he should be able to collect his captain's allowance.

For the rest, it was as if he entertained no slightest doubt as to his professional fortunes and his political success. All he had to do was wait till the end of the war and then stretch out his hand. Everything was coming to him as his right. In him, and the same thing was happening to so many other wounded men, an attitude was taking shape according to which the hospital was a period followed by a white margin, between the chapter of giving and suffering and that of receiving and enjoying. Who would pay the debt? The fatherland, society, nature? God? No matter. Somebody. In this state of mind he could permit himself whatever he pleased with Eugenia after she had returned. Now he showed great tenderness toward her, and because she was so fair of complexion, with so slender a neck that it seemed it must bend toward the west, he nicknamed her Betulla, or birch tree. During all these months she said not a word to him about marriage, nor about herself; and he accepted this silence as part of the just payment that was due him for his battles and his wounds.

And he would smile with a defiant air when she scolded him for this thoughtlessness in going about with so insufficiently protected a chest, when he was yet so weak.

Rarely did they meet in the house on Via Merulana, where Filippo went but three or four times in all, between July and August, on a visit to the colonel, who filled him with unbearable boredom. They met almost every morning at Castel Sant'Angelo. She would arrive on time; he, who did not get up so early, would often keep her waiting, and then he would tell her that he had not been very well during the night. If the day were warm and beautiful, he would say:

"Well, Betulla, shall we go out of the city to-day?"

"Let's go," she would reply, in ill humour.

In order to enjoy so much leisure Eugenia had to pretend to her father that she was still in the hospital service, and the daily, detailed lying weighed upon her like a shame. He would leave with a little half-empty bag in his hand, so as to be admitted to an inn, in the company of a lady, with no questions. She soon learned to provide herself with a long, thick automobile veil in which she wrapped her face, as soon as she got into the train or the tram, so as not to be seen. As a matter of fact, their affair was public knowledge, and one of the first to detect it was Signora Monti, who prided herself upon having broken up the flirtation between her son and Eugenia. (Mary was something of an "egotist," but after all she was "another matter," "from a different social stratum.") The poor girl felt a weakening of the knees every time she stepped upon the running-board at the beginning of those excursions which she did not dare to call unworthy, although every morning, when she opened the window, she would pray for rain so as to avert the danger. They would go to Tivoli, to Frascati, to Albano, and many a gloomy staircase knew them, he pale with eagerness, she throbbing with shame, tortured by the hand that he held about her waist while a domestic went ahead to show them to their rooms, which had been "polluted" by the endless, scrutinising glance of the proprietress. Often they had to make their way back in haste, so as not to lose the return train, and he would

walk a few paces ahead of her, in angry disillusionment at her "cold sadness." On the way back they would exchange but few words, or none at all if he were reading the paper. A few times,—few because it was so expensive—they would be away for the whole day, from early morning. Then they would go as far as Subiaco, or to Anazio, or Santa Marinella; once, despite the prevalence of malaria, they even went to Ninfa. The more varied roads and the longer time at their disposal diverted the man's mind from his desire and the woman's from her unexpressed rancour; she would gather a few flowers, he would rhapsodise over the view or the invigorating wine; and on sunny days there were fleeting moments of joy. On rare occasions Eugenia would sing, and each time Filippo would be surprised at the weak, white voice, like a silver thread, with which she sang old songs whose words he could not recall.

At Ninfa, among the ruined palaces and the swamps, she sang:

"Cogli la rosa e lascia star la foglia.
Ho tanta voglia—ho tanta voglia
Di far con te all'amor."

"I like that song," exclaimed Filippo with a sudden outburst, and he bounded upon her to kiss her on the mouth.

"Let me go. Let me go, I say! Can't you see that they're looking at us?" (Although no one could see from the gloomy houses of Norma that nestled upon the mountain.) Her chin trembled. She had surprised in his eyes a flash of cynical arrogance, as livid as those beheld between one cloud and another far over the sea, toward night, out of which no thunder is expected, so distant they are.

"No," she said to herself, as if in prayer, as she regained her composure. "He can't be like that. I'm unjust toward him."

He, on the other hand, reached home, despite the unpleasantnesses of the day, as sated and heavy with happiness as a bee with honey, after lingering among the thyme.

With the decline of summer things began to look darker.

First of all, Marco Berti arrived almost without warning but was at once declared unfit for war service and was placed as secretary in an infantry station in Rome itself. He offered no explanations as to his tardiness, nor did his father ask for any; but from certain indirect statements it was understood that he had gone through plenty of trouble before he was able to see that his wife and child would be comfortable during his absence, which he expected to last for about a year. He resembled Eugenia in his tall stature and his wandering glance, but he was gawky and more sallow, with eyeglasses behind which he seemed to concentrate the memory of something bitter and hostile. The two men, when they were introduced, took an instant dislike to each other.

"But why?" asked Eugenia of her brother.

"Just because."

"But why? A fine reason!"

"Because he must be a climber."

"No."

"A crank, at any rate."

She was afraid now of being watched, and she made their meetings less frequent. But they still went on an occasional outing to the lakes; and once, on the road between Nemi and Genzano, she said to Filippo, after a long silence:

"Do you know? The other night mamma came back."

"Mamma? Who's that?"

"Mamma. My mother."

"Ah. . . . And . . . Marco?"

"Marco leaves for Gorizia."

He did not inquire into further particulars, which were not many and which he learned from other sources. Signora Giselda, after her friend had been called to the colours, had been compelled to close the inn and had returned to Rome with her trunks and her wigs, walking into the house one fine October afternoon while her husband was at the office. That night the colonel took a long look at her, forestalling the scene of pardon which she was leading up to with a sigh and a "Filiberto, my Filiberto!" Without a word he restored her to her place at the table. Then they talked of other mat-

ters. The kindly folk who heard the news remarked smilingly that Signora Giselda had returned from an extended vacation in the mountains.

It required effort on Filippo's part to yield to Eugenia's insistence and visit Colonel Berti, even after the return of the prodigal wife, and he was sorry that he had complied. The colonel ate plenty of tarts with his tea; Marco, who was daily expecting orders to leave, kept standing and gazing at the ceiling; Signora Giselda told him that she was honoured to have in her home a hero, a luminary of the rostrum, a political power of the future ("Giselda Berti, you see, knows exactly what's doing"), and other unpalatable nonsense which he hardly heard. Instead, he looked first at the mother, then at the daughter, and secretly compared the one with the other. "Here," he thought, "as a young woman the mother was as the daughter is now. Perhaps a bit less refined. Eugenia, in twenty or thirty years, will be like Signora Giselda, with her nose meeting her mouth, with the fairness of her complexion become as consistent as a cheese, and with those same rose-begonia spots at the top of her cheeks. And perhaps . . ." he continued. For his imagination feared nothing. But he did not formulate the thought as he had begun, translating it in another manner that made him laugh innerly: "Perhaps I'll be in Colonel Berti's boots."

Then he lighted a cigarette (he had given up smoking a pipe ever since he had left with his company on the morning of the assault) and took his leave.

"I must admit," he added on his way, "that my future wife's family is not very attractive. The father is bearable at times, the mother we can pass over, the brother is half a deserter." He held this opinion of Marco in order to vent an unreasoning aversion.

"Nor can my own family be very attractive to strangers, if I myself feel a certain intolerance of them. But they're not so bad as these people."

"Perhaps all families are antipathetic. All you have to do is to see a person with his parents, and you realise that his voice, his face, everything about him, in fact, belongs up

to a certain point to them. A sort of family odour, a feeling that he belongs to the tribe and to that soil. You can feel the heaviness of the earth."

For the first time he had the sensation of having consumed all the happiness of his convalescence. During the days that followed he made increasingly ardent and unsuccessful efforts to regain his hold upon himself and life. Especially he was disgusted with the image of Signora Giselda that kept irremediably rising between him and Eugenia. "Her leaving Novesa, her *sacrifice*,—for it was as this that, without saying so outright, she meant it to be regarded—wasn't it rather a hereditary facility?" And now, through a certain lack of respect, he became more exacting, for Eugenia's position was all the more difficult, despite Marco's departure, in that the pretext of nurse duty was no longer possible and Signora Giselda, in agreement with her husband, maintained that "the place for girls was at home." Once, since Eugenia refused to go to their former room on the Via dei Serpenti, through fear that she might encounter lodgers whom she knew, Filippo proposed to her in half words that she go, with the regular handbag he used to carry on their excursions, to some hotel in Rome.

"Not that! No, not that!" she cried, stamping her foot and quivering all over.

Filippo was provoked. His nerves were getting worse, though outwardly he was in better health than ever. He felt oversated with idleness and indifferent to work. During the first months of convalescence he had visited Federico but infrequently; besides, the Rustica, with Mary isolated in the final weeks of pregnancy and in the early weeks after childbirth, had lost some of its fascination.

"When Giulio is born we'll have to buy an electric heater for the cold days," said old Signora Monti. Or: "We won't overdo matters with Giulio's milking. Neither too long nor too short,—just a year."

Yet it must be admitted that she yielded with good grace to the fresh proof of indiscipline afforded by Mary in the

delivery of a Giulia instead of a Giulio. The girl was born with perfectly delineated features,—a thin nose, a fringe of curly hair on its round head, and a chin so precise that it made everybody laugh. There was no change at the Rustica, except for a few new arrangements on the upper floor and the addition of a nurse to the staff of servants. The matter of the baptism, however, was the subject of long controversies. Federico was against any excessive pomp, and won out. Federico, in agreement with Mary, wanted Eugenia to be the godmother, for he recalled, without mentioning it, that she had been present and hadn't winked an eyelash when Pierantoni had amputated his leg. But here Signora Adriana's veto was not to be overridden. And she was angry that Eugenia's name was included in the list of invited guests, "with that crazy mother of hers dragging along, too!" But the madcap mother, thanks to the tact of the colonel, who resigned himself to taking to bed under the pretext that he needed a mustard-plaster, remained at home.

On the very day of the baptism, Bisi invited several of the guests to visit, on the following week, the hospital for deranged soldiers. The villa in which they were housed stood on the slope of Monte Mario, on an airy eminence, and the visitors, all men, with the exception of Mary and Bisi's wife, gladly accepted. Federico, who had not abandoned his military uniform—he had even ordered a new one—hopped unceasingly hither and thither, as if he were merely on stilts.

The most interesting of the cases was the Nameless Soldier. He had been struck by a fragment in the left frontal region, and had had his skull trepanned. Neither number nor documents had been found upon him.

"Ssh!" cautioned Antonio Bisi to silence the small gathering. "Please, ladies and gentlemen."

The sufferer sat waiting, arms extended down to his knees and eyes watery.

"Tell me, my dear fellow," asked Bisi, adopting a kindly, nasal, professional voice, "what date is it?"

"The 14th of November, 1916, sir."

"Fine, fine. Now don't get excited. And tell me, what did you have for lunch?"

"Bean soup, boiled meat and potatoes, roast chestnuts, and a quarter-flask of wine, Major."

"And tell me, my fine fellow, your father? Your mother?"

"I don't remember, Major."

"Can't you, really? Try hard, my dear boy. Not even your baptismal name? The name of your birthplace? How old are you? Come now, tell us."

And inclining his head affably over the man's right shoulder, he encouraged the reply. But now the poor fellow was really excited.

"I can't remember a thing, Major."

And soon he burst into tears, crying in a thick, stupid, desolate voice:

"I want to know my name. I want to know who I am. I want my ma-a-mma!"

"You can tell from his accent," explained Bisi to his little audience, "that he comes from Apulia, and that he's a peasant; that's about all. This poor fellow doesn't even know his name! Yet"—he added, with prophetic solemnity, growing red and rising upon his toes—"science is about to triumph even over these misfortunes."

"Very interesting," commented Signora Marta Bisi. "Antonino is dedicating a long chapter to him in his book on traumatic amnesia. It's an exemplary case."

"I don't understand," said Filippo, leading Mary toward a wide window, "what fun there can be in hunting out the name and the genealogy of that poor devil. When they learn these things, they'll know definitively that he's an unfortunate wretch. Now, with a little spirit, it might be imagined that he was a king eating our frugal meals."

"Naughty boy!" said Mary, laughing, just to have something to say. They had been together during the whole visit. Filippo also saw her to the automobile, and smiled to her too noticeably as she stepped in. Then he handed Federico the crutch.

Federico and Mary reached the Rustica toward nightfall.

As she gave the breast to the baby her eyes sparkled with the thought that she had made her husband jealous and thus obtained who knows what. He, however, was surly and tired, with a wrinkle of weariness fretting his forehead. For a little while before dinner they sat down opposite each other, both silent, and it was as if the soul of each heard the soul of the other softly pronouncing the same words:

"What pain! What wretchedness!"

"What wretchedness! What pain!"

But Filippo hardly gave any thought that night to his inconclusive mischievousness. The appearance of the Nameless Soldier had opened all the sluices of his unhappiness. He felt his heart flooded with the same old anguish. "I'm like that wretched fellow. What does it matter if I have a first and last name? I don't know who I am, what I'm doing nor what I want." It seemed to him as if the November rain were falling into his very soul as into a ramshackle hut. The summer was dead forever. On his way to bed after an unpalatable meal, he was surprised, as he passed the mirror, to find himself mimicking the grimaces of the lunatic, repeating voicelessly, "I want to know who I am! I want my ma-a-mma!"

Out of sheer fear of himself he began to visit the Taramannas' every night; here there was plenty of light, plenty of noise, and they played poker and billiards. Clotilde, the third youngest daughter, became profoundly interested in him as soon as she learned that he was the lover of the exceedingly beautiful Eugenia Berti and wasn't even marrying her.

"Tell me," she would say to him, crossing her legs, "tell me something awfully terrible, dear Captain Rubè."

"Listen," said Taramanna to him one evening. "I don't like the way you're carrying on at all. You're just wasting your time. Those governmental fat-heads have entrusted me with a mission to Paris. That's a disaster for me, as you'll readily understand, but I must accept out of a spirit of discipline. I'm going to take along one of my girls. (I'll choose from them by drawing lots. Hush!) Do you want to come too? I can have you called to the Munitions Office."

"H'm . . ." replied Filippo, who had already accepted

Taramanna's good offices in hastening his promotion and the bestowal of the medal. "Not a bad idea, at that."

The next day he explained to Eugenia how matters stood with him.

"My cure is complete. What would you have me do? Returning to the front, in the winter, when there's nothing doing, even if I were feeling well, wouldn't be at all to my taste. I'll have time for that in the spring. A few months at Paris might come in useful for the future. What do you say?"

"Certainly."

"Certainly what?"

"Certainly that's the thing to do."

That afternoon he wrote her a letter suggesting that in the meantime they have their engagement announced. He made an appointment with her for the following day, at Villa Borghese. Before he began to speak she interrupted with:

"No comedies, now. And an announcement of a betrothal between us would be a comedy. Why, everybody knows. . . . When you'll be in a position to, when you'll want to, we can get down to serious business. For the rest," and she raised her voice, which was becoming disagreeable, "I need nothing."

He was afraid that she would burst into tears, for her mouth was twitching and Signora Giselda's reddish-begonia spots were appearing on her cheeks. Involuntarily he turned aside to look at a calf that was grazing upon the meadow.

CHAPTER IV

Before he left he had a visit from Massimo Ranieri. His companion was ready to cancel all recollection of the differences that had divided them in the hut on the Dolomites, if any such recollection remained. He rushed forward to greet him with both hands extended. He, too, had been wounded in the battle of the Trentino, and far more seriously than Rubè, for the bullet, furrowing his cranium, had condemned him for some time to epileptic fits, to a stammering that impeded the beginning of all his sentences, and to sudden loss of memory that often cut them short. Not even by December could he say that he was fully cured, but:

"I've pulled so many wires," he told Rubè, "that at last I've managed it. I'm going to be sent back to the front. And to a sector of my own choosing."

As he said this his eyes flashed for a few instants with a bluish light, and he turned them slowly about like lanterns. They were like this only in moments of repressed joy. The burn of the gun had extinguished them. But formerly that weary, solemn serenity of theirs, which was able to look for a long time at everything without taking umbrage, had been inexhaustible, preserving an innocence despite a youth coldly spent between hunting and lovemaking; conventional pleasures these were, learned by heart, which Massimo had entrusted to his body, holding his soul intact and aloof. Meeting that glance Filippo felt deeply his plebeian inferiority and the meanness of the courage that he had conquered by force, in comparison with the boldness of this born warrior, which was as simple and carefree as a game.

"What's your hurry?" he asked. "You were saved by a miracle, but you're not well. The war will last another five years yet. There'll be plenty of time to get back into it."

"That's very true for you who can do so many things and

can serve the country in every sort of way. But the only thing I ever learned was how to fight, and if I don't return to the front I'll die of yawning."

There was neither antagonism nor insidious blame in these words, and Filippo was wrong to feel piqued. But an hour later he had forgotten all about it, and everything seemed secondary to the care of discovering some pretext under which to leave either two days before or two days after Taramanna and Clotilde—the daughter chosen by lot—so as not to endure their tedious company during the long journey from which he expected solitude and inner conciliation. Even at Paris, where his patron remained for two months, he saw them rather rarely; some evenings at dinner or after dinner in the lobby of the Hôtel Meurice. They would drink a whisky and soda, smoke Muratti cigarettes, discuss the invasion of Rumania or the Russian mysteries, leaning in turn upon the various hypotheses without rejecting any of them a priori, with that strange spirit in which the Italians, while they were at war, tried to contemplate it from some spiritually neutral observatory beyond the range of the guns.

"Italy," said Rubè, "resembles a man engaged in a duel to the death, who between one lunge and the other amuses himself by wagering with the referee about his own skin. It's a phenomenon of an over-refined culture."

Clotilde went often to the theatre or on walks, read Barbusse, and slept late mornings. One night she asked Filippo point blank:

"Tell me the truth, lawyer Rubè. Is it or is it not true that you are head over heels in love with Eugenia Berti?"

"I," replied Filippo impudently—the next second asking himself whether he hadn't accidentally hit upon the truth—"I've never been head over heels in love with anybody."

That was all.

He had a schedule; every morning and every afternoon he would leave the furnished room that he had on the fourth floor of a place on the Rue Saint-Honoré, cross the Rue Castiglione and the Place Vendôme, and pass the church of the Magdalen, behind which his office was situated, gazing fre-

quently at the colonnade. He would spend two or three hours of the morning, and two or three of the afternoon, at his duties, and almost regularly he had time to read the newspapers there and attend to his personal correspondence,—cards now and then to his mother and sisters (after the first well composed letter in which, enclosing two hundred-lire notes received at Paris, he told them that he renounced his monthly allowance, without adding, however, that he was earning around five hundred francs per day, which would have seemed an enormous sum at Calinni),—picture postcards to friends in the legal profession, to old clients, to local voters,—methodical, not very interesting letters, "as husband to wife," for Eugenia, and long, queer political epistles to Mary. On certain days when there was not very much to do, he would put together the sheets of her sloping hand, which, after the middle of the page became almost diagonal, with the words starting out large and becoming gradually smaller. Mary was nursing Giulia, to whose name Signora Adriana would not permit the application of a diminutive, and she mirrored herself in the eyes of her baby, who now, with the reddishness of the first days faded away from her adorable little body, was as whitish blue as a Della Robbia terra cotta. From time to time she would find the leisure to reply to Filippo, sending him in return an Italian chronicle, rather confused and hardly conclusive, but picturesque on account of its very lack of proportion; she would see that the correspondence remained for a long time upon the secretary, so that Federico might read it if he was so inclined.

Filippo's superior was a peaceful colonel, though expert in metallurgy and explosives, who gave his subordinates little trouble. The latter were all engineers, with the exception of the newcomer, whom they looked upon indulgently as some intruder who (as they thought, without getting too excited about it) had procured a sinecure among them through "pull" with influential personages. But Filippo wore the blue ribbon with the silver star, which was a sign of indisputable superiority. Another sign was his relations, at times rapidly confidential, with the Italian politicians who came to Paris upon

certain missions, or, as they put, to "feel the ground." Some he already knew from his Roman days, others were sent to him by Taramanna, who termed him an "expert upon the French political situation." So that little by little he began to appear as the centre of action, even as the spider in the centre of the web; and he was also seen strolling up and down the platform of the Gare de Lyon in conference with the ambassador, while they were waiting for the delayed train from Italy. The engineer officers were not by nature fantastic creatures, yet one of them imagined that Filippo concealed an important mission beneath his apparently modest position; the hypothesis made little headway. But gradually they grew to appreciate his knowledge of modern history and the information upon current affairs which they presumed he received straight from the source. Jestingly, though without malice, they addressed him as "honourable." At night, at the restaurant on the Boulevard des Capucins, where they often dined together, they would have him explain to them the diplomatic and the military struggles. They had as likely as not run through the columns of the *Matin* on their ride through the subway to the office. Filippo explained everything. They listened to him with deferential curiosity, and now and then somebody would, after reviewing the account, interrupt with: "Maybe, but I can't see that victory coming." Or, "I don't say No, but these Frenchmen are worse than the Germans."

Such was the shell of his life, brilliant and compact. But the kernel, he thought, was as black and bitter as a rotten nut. Once, changing his blue ribbon, which had become too frayed, he felt shame, and if it were not for practical considerations he would have got rid of it. He suffered anew from insomnia, sudden weakness of sight, and faintness, which he tried to conceal out of sheer pride. Though he did not dare to consult a physician, he feared that the lesion in his lung might have returned, for, in this Parisian climate, which that winter was cold and changeable, he had begun to cough again. He felt outside of the war and political action, nor did he deceive himself into taking as a full meal these crumbs of conversation that were dropped his way by the

higher powers, and this noisy gossip, part propaganda, part prophecy, part criticism, which whirled in the void without entering the machine of deeds. He felt out of the war, out of everything; on the banks of society and life, as turbulent and foamy as the stream that leaps capriciously into the mill canal, most picturesque to gaze upon but turning no wheels.

At the office they had assigned him, in view of his legal training, to the examination of contracts. But at bottom the colonel knew more about this than he. Filippo could not make out how his work was superior to that of the engineer officers, who were nimbler than he and possessed that professional precision which is in its own way a grace. There was, of course, in his eyes, a superiority of intelligence. Yet what was this but a gloomy geniality in suffering and causing to suffer? He tried to think of Eugenia as little as possible, but her image would rise inevitably before his eyes whenever he endured (rather than sought) the petty pleasures offered to him by the street. As with words of forced gallantry and an empty laugh he accompanied to her door some department store salesgirl, it would seem to him that Eugenia had remained behind, seated near the bed, with her scarcely visible face bent over some delicate linen embroidery, scissors in hand, ready to cut a thread. "A young Parca," he would say to himself, "such as a high school student might picture to himself." A vision that was at the same time ridiculous and lugubrious.

He found relief in walking alone through certain streets where the pale sunsets printed the blush of old branches upon the closed windows. The Rue de Valois, the Rue de Grenelle, with their palaces hidden behind courtyards before whose gates the passerby paused like an outcast, were his favourites. "While the foot journeys, the heart rejoices." He recalled this proverb of his birthplace, and in all truth the sound of his footfalls beat glad time to the passing of the hours. It was better still when he could unbosom himself in talk; for then, in the pleasure of listening to himself and being listened to, it seemed that he was drinking a slightly bitter, seething happiness. Paris was dark at night, and her offerings were

veiled. More than by the restaurants in the centre of the city, where luxury lured with distracting charms that were so rare in Italy, he was dizzied with desire at thought of the Auteuil apartments and their seventeenth-century surroundings, where, behind the drawn curtains, before the fireplaces, the French women, seemingly transparent in their dresses, chatted in their sing-song that seemed ever the same yet ever new, like the tale of the titmouse on the clear, cold mornings. He lacked no opportunities to have himself presented, but he was compelled to avoid them because of his scant wardrobe, which, during the months of neutrality, he had used up without procuring any new ones. And going about in his uniform irked him as if he wore it without right. In vain did he try to justify himself, recalling the efforts that he had made to serve his country sooner and more strenuously than was called for, and the heroism—known to none except Eugenia—of having conquered the wild fears that had assailed him before going into action, his transfer to the infantry, the trenches and the mortal wound. His reminiscences were as dry, and, he would have said, as friable as the sloughed skin of a serpent. Even his wound seemed believable only when he was attacked by a slight fit of coughing, particularly upon arising. Both the joy and the grief of the past had become unreal, supposititious, and he had strength only to tolerate the present and to fear or desire the future. "This inorganicity of my memory," he concluded, "is my especial stupidity."

It took him several months before he could save up the sum necessary to have himself made, by a tailor on the Rue Royale, a fine black coat and striped trousers. Among the first women to whom he was introduced was "the general's wife." Her salon was near the Trocadero,—not very important but dear to some score of students, artists, and lofty functionaries who were fond of alternating politics with music. In politics the general's wife was for a war to the finish, and therefore an adversary of Briand, Ribot, and their "despicable cunning." In music she was eclectic and was even suspected of German leanings. One who did not know

her, hearing her called "the general's wife," might conjure up the image of a black lace bonnet adorning a grey-haired dame. But that belonged to other days, when careers were slow! General Lambert was forty-five, already *in pectore* commander of an army corps; his spring-like thinness and his hawk-like face, all profile, as was the fashion then among the "young leaders," promised even better things. But his wife was twenty years younger than he, and more appropriate to her youth than the title of general's wife was her name, Celestine Lambert, which suggested a convent girl. In short, it was impossible to imagine her without having seen her, and once one had seen her, one no longer thought of the convent.

By coincidence, however, she had really been educated by the nuns of the Sacré Cœur at Lille, who recalled her always as one of the best of their little charges, with all her irrepressible, holy joy "that seemed to sing praises to the Lord." At eighteen she had married Major Lambert, and in seven years of matrimony she had borne him four children. They were a sight to see when, at tea hour, Celestine would have them march by,—guide left!—before her friends, one a palm taller than the other, like organ pipes, and all four boys! Pierre, Jean, Charles, and Henri, all dressed alike in striped flannel, and deep blond as honey buns. The sight was all the more queer in that nobody would have taken for the mother of four children this splendid woman whose spotless complexion at night radiated from out her red tunic. This wearing only red tunics in empire fashion at home, changing merely the shades from hortense rose to cardinal red, was a whim of hers that not even her mother could cure.

"It's a surprise to me that your husband doesn't go blind with all this red about."

He, however, let her do as she pleased, and called her red flag, banderillera, communarde. Wherefore, the librarian Monnier, who knew him, and as the owner of a white goatee, could afford the jest, said to her betimes, even in the presence of her husband, who came at least every two months on some mission or on leave to Paris:

"Well, Madame Celestine, do you intend or not to proclaim the Commune after seven years of monarchy?"

On these occasions she would not answer a word, but would laugh with innumerable concentric oh's, like the ripples of a lake when the swan dives down, and as harmonious as vocalises of bel canto. She laughed too much, according to General Lambert, who once told her that such a laugh would never have been permitted in his house by La Rochefoucauld, for example. But when she laughed like that her pomegranate lips became so bewitching that none could keep from gazing upon her with love.

But it was all a jest. And one realised this in the afternoon, when in a spirit of contrast she affected a style of tight, smooth clothing that made her look like some inexpugnable Amazon.

"You may be sure," said the erudite Monnier emphatically to Filippo, on the first evening that he was received, as they were walking home along the banks of the Seine, "that Madame Lambert is a perfect wife, a perfect mother, a perfect Frenchwoman, a perfect musician, and a perfect beauty."

Perfect beauty,—not quite. For one in quest of a madonna head, or, better still, of a sepulchral high relief, there was no comparison between Eugenia and Madame Lambert. The latter could boast of Flemish blood, and her face was really colour rather than line, with too many undulations between her mouth and her temples, and tiny lips that were too fleshy, and a nose too blunt at the top. But one must have scrutinised her very closely before noting these details. The ensemble of her face was as bright as a treasure, above all when from her smooth forehead fell a tuft of her golden bronze tresses,—long, soft, dry, as fragrant as a bunch of aromatic herbs. Yet nothing in her, not even her flesh, as firm and white as a magnolia petal, could equal her voice, so mellow and soft, so even, without any metallic overtones, that when it sounded unexpectedly, it made one start, as with the sudden emergence of the solo violoncello. What became of Eugenia's voice, like that of a sick child, in Filippo's memory?

"Cogli la rosa e lascia star la foglia. . . ."

Even Mary's voice warmed with a contralto resonance only when she was moved. No, not a woman that Filippo had ever known radiated such joy. It was all he could do to recall, by vague analogy, his dear schoolgirl Ersilia, smiling amongst the blossoming apple-trees, but she was as a mere serving maid in comparison with a goddess.

Perhaps, he thought, this spring of joy was so limpid because no one had yet drunk its waters. Credulous as he was—and for once not so mistakenly—Filippo did not find it hard to admit, as everybody said, that Celestine was a perfect wife. Not only that. He imagined that even her husband, the general, was but a stranger to her more intimate self. Too many children in seven years (rather in six, for the youngest was already beginning to walk), for a husband who really loved his wife! And her own very exuberance revealed the woman in a certain sense inviolate, virgin in her own way, or, in an impertinent word, disoccupied.

The perfection of which he had made himself the panegyrist authorised Monnier to ask her questions of this sort:

"When will it at last be bruited throughout Paris that Madame Celestine has chosen a lover?"

"What would you, my dear friend?" she would reply, with a seventeenth century preciosity at which, a moment later, she would laugh gleefully. "The roses of sin cannot be plucked from a bush that the gardener cultivates so assiduously, requiring fruit almost every year." And with her hand—not quite long enough and thin, somewhat out of fashion—she would indicate the photographs of her four "mountebanks," enclosed in a long silver frame.

Filippo, with his southerner's intransigency, brought few offerings to the altar of this type of virtue. "Neither my mother nor Mary would consider her virtuous. . . . She hasn't sinned because up to now she hasn't felt the desire to. Perhaps she'll never sin because everything makes her happy, and she doesn't have to look for happiness in scabrous, risky affairs. . . . And it's also quite likely that she can't lie. Certainly it would be intolerable for her to deceive her husband. . . . She is beyond both sin and virtue. Instead of Celestine

she should be called Sanity. But Sanity is ridiculous. Innocence. . . . When I feel greater confidence, I'm going to tell her that."

It took some two weeks for him to acquire that greater confidence. On the first night Madame Lambert had exchanged only a few words with him,—conventional phrases, inquiring whether he believed a grand offensive likely on the Italian front. For the rest, the entire evening had been less gay and more inconclusive than usual. They had discussed Russia and Kerensky, whom many, with the hostess, admired as a new Danton. Celestine had not felt like singing or playing, and after having made an attack upon the piano, jumping from Grieg to Beethoven and from Debussy to Scarlatti, she had arisen puffing roguishly and brushing back her loosened hair from her forehead. As Filippo was kissing her hand prior to departure, she recalled that she had not spoken enough to the new visitor, and said to him:

"Come any evening you please. This isn't a salon, but an informal company of friends. I'll be glad to see you."

The following night she was surprised to see him back. But she called him over at once, and sat down with him upon a sofa in a corner.

"Sit down here. I want to know you better. I've never known a Neapolitan."

He explained to her effusively that he was not a Neapolitan, and that from his tiny mountain region one could half get a glimpse, on very clear days, of a strip of the sea behind the woods and the crags.

"No matter," she replied, unconvinced. "It's the divine sea of Homer just the same. Then you're a Neapolitan. And moreover," she confirmed, laughing, "I insist upon it."

The divine sea of Homer led them to speak about Italy, which she did not know.

"I'm so weary of spending the summer on the shores of that roaring ocean. The first spring after the war I'm going for a month's rest to the Isola Bella."

"Rest?" asked Filippo, listlessly.

"Surely, for a rest. Do you think it's nothing,—this rush-

ing down into the cellar every time a Boche airplane comes flying around? And my husband? Let's see. Do you imagine that his army corps is child's play?"

"Ah," he corrected himself, even more carelessly than at first. "I didn't know that you wished to go there with your husband."

These blunders impressed Celestine as "southern spontaneity," and amused her. She even wished to serve him tea before all the others. That evening she wore an amaranth tunic and a somewhat darker plume in her hair. In her collection of tunics there were some three or four with necks judiciously high, to please her mother, who could not endure this "exposure." But her mother and her sisters had not been quick enough to escape from Lille, and there was no way of seeing them until the war should end. So Celestine was reserving these tunics that she called "sacerdotal" for the "victory celebration." Those that she regularly wore were so cut that her admirable bosom, incredibly classic upon so flexible a body, was half outside, like a double flower still enfolded in red sepals. She needed but to bend over for a moment, and it seemed as if she were offering herself entire.

"She shows them," said the untiring Monnier, "like a decoration. But you must confess, my friends, that the grand ribbon of the Legion d'Honneur isn't worth as much."

That very night, as she poured tea for Filippo, she bent down without reserve. He took the cup, which trembled in his hands, and spilled almost half of it. Only a moment later did she understand the reason for his disturbance, and she was neither pleased nor offended. She was simply astonished. "These volcanic southerners!" It may be said that it was Filippo who, gradually, taught her the rudiments of modesty. She had none by nature, and the nuns of the Sacré Cœur had been admiringly preoccupied with her "ingenuousness." Her husband had been obliged, at his own expense, to change the bath-room window-panes to ground glass, because twice he had surprised her, dressed only in her flowing hair, drawing aside the curtains to watch, quite unconcernedly, the bustle on the street. In company she sat as she pleased,

and not infrequently, as she scampered across the room from one group of friends to the other, she would plump into an armchair, cross her legs, and show a dazzling area of white above her garter, which was fastened by a clasp of tiny emeralds. Among the visitors, naturally, it was the custom not to gaze too closely, but Filippo's eyes were incontinent and voracious. She was slow to grasp this, then she would jump up hastily and rearrange her dress over her knees, without taking anything amiss.

However strange it may seem, no glance of desire that dared to take itself seriously had lingered upon her until she had made the acquaintance of Filippo. No sooner had she left the convent than she had married a man who was not to be trifled with and who was visibly in love with her. At once all his friends had gathered about to look at her as if she were a jewel behind a window. If, rarely, any one looked at her for too long, with her bizarre, inquiring eyes she would cut that glance to the roots.

Filippo interested her as a novelty, although not too much. She liked him because he was strange and said strange things. For example, about Paris and France. He adored them (in distinction from his engineer colleagues), but in a way that was very extravagant, and, thought Celestine, "fundamentally false." It seemed to him that this civility had reached a geometric delineation, with neither shades nor nuances, and no residuum of doubt or sorrow. The true Parisian and the true Parisienne lived in a beatific response of deed to will, and after a long journey had found a sort of natural happiness.

Even the passer-by seemed to him, in a certain sense, as potent as a king. This impression became dramatic on certain moonlit nights after the snow, as he walked through the dark and half-deserted Place Vendôme. Then France struck him as a monumental, astral structure, already eternal, already beyond corruption, and incapable alike of growth or decay. Not even the Germans, if they were to enter on parade beneath the Arc de l'Etoile, could destroy it.

"Listen to this, gentlemen," exclaimed Celestine. "Signor Rubè says that all of us Frenchmen are kings."

"We," replied the *chef de cabinet* of a minister, eyeing with his monocle the foreigner whom he suspected of flattery, "are all most humble servitors at the foot of a queen."

It was her opinion, on the other hand, that happiness and naturalness had their home in the south, and on this question, too, Filippo held exceptional opinions.

"We Italians simulate happiness conventionally, just as the Englishman, even when he's a swindler, counterfeits gentlemanliness."

He spoke eloquently of the sadness of the south, and of war's havoc.

"Then you are all unhappy? You, too?"

"I, too," he added, with conviction. "Like the others."

"So much the worse. Misfortune disgusts me. I don't believe in it."

Once Filippo had the presumption to ask whether it did not cause her great suffering to think of her mother and sister forced to remain at Lille "under the German lash."

"Oh, well, my dear friend, one does what one can to alleviate their suffering. . . . We send them packages. . . . And then, matters adjust themselves."

She spoke these sentences with salutary serenity: *le malheur me dégoûte, on s'arrange.* She had a habit of saying, in a manner all her own, *assez, assez!* "enough, enough," whenever anything disagreeable was told to her. Then she would mimic the nasal, entreating voice of children when they don't wish to drink their beverage to the bottom of the cup. But she would always conclude with a laugh.

"This morning, at bath," she once said to Filippo, "I discovered a mark on my body."

"Where?"

"Somewhere, you rascal. And I said to myself: 'If I were to drown in the bath-tub I'd turn completely that colour, and swell up.' Horrors! I'm scared of death, and illness, and of every malodorous thing. Puah!"

"If you're so horrified at the thought of death, how is it that you favour a war without quarter?"

"Oh, the war, you see, is a different thing."

Filippo now visited her often during the day, immediately after breakfast. She had taken it into her head that it was most unbecoming in an Italian not to know how to sing, and that he had a most beautiful velvet-like voice and a fine ear for music (it was really true, as he said, that he had heard very little and had been left with a great thirst for it), and that therefore he must take three lessons per week from her in singing.

At last he told her what he had had in mind for some time:

"If you could be rechristened, I shouldn't call you Celestine. Your name is Innocence."

"How's that? What an exaggeration!"

He explained himself:

"If you were to come one fine day into a garden where a tree grew with the beautiful forbidden fruit, who can say that you wouldn't pluck it? Up to now you've been as you are because you've always walked along singing, with your eyes wandering here and there."

"You may be right," she said, becoming meditative. And this time she did not laugh.

The lessons were a joke, though Celestine really was in earnest. They gave them up, because once Filippo interpreted too daringly a motion that she made with her mouth and her heart, as she held a note and raised her eyes from the keyboard. Whereupon he brought his face close to hers and prolonged the note until almost brushing her lips. She let herself glide from the seat, and remained squatting upon the carpet with her knees between her hands, continuing to stare into his pupils.

"My dear man," she said, bursting into laughter that was as sparkling as a fountain, "aren't you afraid you'll wind up by pouring your solfeggio right down my throat?"

That day seemed to him inviolable. Two hours later he received at home a package containing his exercises, which for that matter did not belong to him, together with a friendly inscription and an ambiguous verse (Celestine knew a little Italian): "That day we read no more."

He wondered whether she had been poking fun at him all the time.

The evening gatherings were somewhat confused, but they bubbled over with intoxicating gaiety. The talk would begin with war and peace; it would end in palm-reading (Celestine had a superb life-line, but it was suddenly broken; Filippo would live and die in politics; Monnier was about to be presented with another little nephew) or in riddles and children's games. The hostess knew how to stir the fire in the hearth, which was a joy to her eyes until spring was well advanced, and to mix whimsical drinks upon the surface of which floated bits of early fruit, and to discuss everything under the sun. It was incredible that she could find time to help Pierre with his lessons, superintend Henri's bath, try out a new pastry recipe, read the reviews from the first column to the last, and commit to memory the modern poets, from Baudelaire down to Claudel. These she afterward declaimed with juicy diction, as her brows traced lacy shadows over her face, and her arm, rarely raised in a gesture as slow as a sigh, would be bared to the pit, which was adorned with a gold musk. With the exception of committee meetings, which she openly detested, and women, who were excluded from her salon almost by law, there was not a thing in life that did not appeal to her passionately.

But they all said she was wonderful when she sang. When she would give the song of Weyla in Wolf's setting, she displayed the power of a chorus, and the crystals of the Louis XVI chandelier rang with the vibrations.

"Yes, I know, I should have become a singer. And," she would add, pretending shame, with her mouth hidden behind her palms, "a dancer, too."

It was said, however, that she danced like a muse. But on this point the general's refusal had been adamant.

At dawn of the 16th of July he left for the coast of Britanny. The soirée of the 15th was the last. For an hour she ran over *Carmen.* Filippo was supposed to turn the pages for her whenever she nodded her head. Until she came to the words

"E l'amore uno strano uccello,
Niun lo puo addomesticar,"

she swayed her head voluptuously without raising her eyes from the piano. But when she threatened

"Se tu non m'ami ebbene io t'amo,
Se t'amo devi tremar per te,"

she suddenly raised those selfsame eyes to Filippo, those same moist cupid's lips that he had seen on the day of the last solfeggio lesson. She finished the piece by extending her arms before her as if she wished to seize a spectre.

Filippo remained, as did all the rest, for another hour, but the echoes of that music filled his heart, and nobody heard another word from him that night. His behaviour was "impossible."

He did not regain his composure until he was in the fresh air along the banks of the Seine. He went to sleep very late, and awoke shortly after; it seemed that some one was knocking at the door.

"Come in," he said, firmly.

As no one answered, he ran with a beating heart to open. The corridor was empty. His black boots stood yawning on the floor. Then he went back and opened the window.

The Parisian dawn was beautiful in summer. There were only swallows on the street. The streaks of violet mist on the horizon resembled garlands of vanilla.

CHAPTER V

CELESTINE, for some reason or other, had returned from the sea a different woman. Not so changed that her friends noticed it, or that she herself was aware of any difference; but Filippo, in his usual way, struck endless resonance and echoes from the most obvious and natural things in the world. All women, coming back from their summer vacation, are somewhat tanned and tired with the languor of an animal still half sunken in lethargy, and then gradually they liven up amidst the crackling of the logs and the clever conversation at evening around the fireplace. Perhaps this was Celestine's case exactly, and there would have been nothing more to say had not Filippo's imagination indulged itself during the whole summer, tracing mythological lines, as from star to star, between one postcard and another that came to him from Mont-Saint-Michel and that, precisely because they contained nothing noteworthy, might seem to be flatteringly reticent. He was now like one who, having allowed himself to be deceived by the sunny surface of a lake in autumn, plunges into the waters in unsuspecting anticipation of an almost tepid bath, and comes running out, stiff with the cold that has contracted his legs. Celestine received him with a clapping of her hands, both of which she extended to him in perfect social hospitality. He was chagrined, and came near calling her "Madame the General's wife." What had he expected? That she should at once resume singing *Carmen* to him, rolling those eyes of hers which drew him like running water watched from a bridge, and parting those strawberry lips? Or that she should fall into his arms with a cry that came from her innermost heart, worthy of Isolde or Manon? He surely had little success when, with insufficient preparation he said to her, as he paused before a good copy of Correggio's Danae that hung in the salon:

"There's a good idea of yours: to have your entire portrait without even a red tunic on. The only difference is in the head."

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw that Celestine had blushed queerly, as if she had only just learned how. Then she said:

"You're mistaken, my friend. It doesn't resemble me at all."

"I'm sorry," she added, concluding with a conventional laugh, "that I can't prove it to you."

In Celestine's external life, if not within her soul, something had changed. General Lambert, promoted, had left for the Salonika front, where he commanded a division. The most commonplace classical reminiscences were not disdained at Saint-Cyr, and were not easily forgotten. So that, on the morning of farewell, the general, taking Celestine's sweet chin in his fingers, said to her:

"Remember, my friend, that Cæsar's wife was in duty bound not only to be, but to appear, above suspicion. Such a course may well be pursued by the wife of Edouard, above all while he has the honour of fighting very far from here but not far from Pharsalia."

"You're less modest than cheeky," answered his wife with smiling eyes, putting her hands on her sides and her arms akimbo. "I hope rather that this time you have overlooked entrusting me with a souvenir of your promotion, as you have been in the habit of doing up to now. For I'm a trifle weary of having emulated your career with my fecundity."

It may be easily understood that she attached little importance to the admonition. But the general, who had formerly occupied only a humble position in the Lambert salon, even when he was present in person (he rarely took part in the conversation and preferred the corners, where he would stand with his knees slightly arched as if he expected at any moment to jump upon his horse), now came up frequently in Celestine's hurried talk. "Edouard says, Edouard hopes, Edouard's last letter. . . ." This was so evident that Grimaud, the head of the office, perceived a scent of "indiscreet petty-

bourgeois fidelity" in these numerous references to her absent husband, and once said to her:

"You allude to him so often that one of these fine days we'll see him come dashing down the road on horseback."

Other things changed in October. One afternoon Filippo ascended the stairs without previous notice and asked after Celestine.

"Madame is not at home," was the reply.

He went down the gloomy staircase, where the shadows lay as soft as a velvet carpet. During the few instants that the door had remained open between the maid and himself, he had not heard the slightest rustle. Yet he could have sworn that she was seated before her little secretary of mahogany and mother-of-pearl, and, with her eyes lifted from her book, was waiting to learn the name of the rejected visitor. In fact, she wrote him a note asking to be excused for not having received him. Her mother had died two weeks previous at Lille, and she had received the news only shortly before his arrival. She wished to be left for a few days "alone with her sorrow." How doubt the grief of a daughter for a mother who had died far off in a part of the fatherland wrested from the fatherland, and for her sisters who had been left by themselves to lay out their mother for burial? Yet those words that Celestine wrote seemed to have been borrowed from a foreign tongue.

Three weeks later she reopened her home. The condolences were brief.

"Yes, the war." It's not very consoling to say "it's the war." Poor mamma! Bah! She had such a determined way about her, *assez crâne,* of enduring misfortunes. She would shrug her shoulders to roll them off her back.

Her gowns, somewhat (not much) different from her previous styles, were at first white or black. Then they became violet. For a short time there was no music. She began on Christmas night, going over the Britanny songs of the child Jesus which she had learned at the sea.

But Filippo witnessed none of this. He had not been able

to overcome the insistence of Eugenia, who now asked him often why he did not take advantage of his leave. "Are you really indispensable at Paris, every day and every hour?"

And, "since he was pursued by ill fortune," he arrived in Rome exactly on the 26th of October, with the first squalls from Caporetto. Of course this disappointment at the lugubrious coincidence, as if who knows what programme of delightful vacation had been upset by it, did not last very long. What good did he expect, even without the Caporetto disaster, of this half unwilling journey at the end of which he was to render a sort of personal report as a dilatory sweetheart?

Those Roman dusks, in which the anguish or the rage of the groups gathered at the corners before the bulletins remained suspended in the air like a fog, were the exact colour of his distraught sensibility. One good thing was that nobody concerned himself with Filippo's affairs, not even Taramanna who, angry with the betrayers of the fatherland, was busy refusing a sub-portfolio in the new ministry. Only the lawyer Viterbo said to him, drying his eyes:

"My dear, dear Rubè! If all had done their duty as you did, Italy would not be in this abyss."

For a few moments he found it difficult to fall into his rôle as a wounded combatant. He had almost forgotten it. And this praise, even though he knew it to be sincere, seemed to have been won by cheating. He coughed, so as to convince himself of the validity of his lung wound. But now these feelings passed quickly, and the pain was as sharp and fleeting as a pinprick.

Even in the Berti household they had other things on their mind. Marco, upon the eve of the offensive, was on the staff of the second army, and all trace of him had been lost.

"With his delicate health! The unhappy boy! They've taken him prisoner, I'm sure! They're going to starve him to death!" shouted Signora Giselda, and she threw herself flat upon the beds, on the couches, blaming her husband, who had forced the innocent child to come back from America, willy-nilly. She wept for the unfortunate little grandchild left there all alone without a father, she wrung her hands until she

went into a fit, and for a half hour at a time her teeth would chatter and her face turn white and spotted. Eugenia spent a good part of the day preparing cold compresses and prescriptions of bromide, and had to attend to all the domestic chores. She scarcely went out now. Because of the house opposite them, with its fifty-five tanné coloured windows, the rooms were very dark from the earliest hours of the afternoon. The first time that Filippo came to greet her she received him with a smile that was also a quiver. She appeared to him as consanguineous and as strange as a sister. A bit aged, too, it seemed.

How desolate was all this life in comparison with what he had left behind! Federico, whom four years before he had admired as a god, he did not even visit. They told him queer things; that at the Rustica Signora Adriana had been ousted from power and that now Father Mariani, who presided over exceedingly lengthy conferences upon biblical exegeses, and the year-old baby, held full sway. Every new tooth was a solemn occasion. And when, to the question, "What's your name, Giulia?" she would answer, with a protruding of her lips, "Juja," there was a hue and cry, and even Federico would come hastening on his crutch, as if the house had taken fire. Federico had, thank the Lord, laid aside his uniform, but as to a wooden leg, it was not to be thought of. He no longer busied himself with medicine, asserted the well informed. "He'll become a monk," said one. "Yes," commented another, "in the order of the Monchi" (maimed).

Filippo wrote a couple of times to Calinni announcing his visit, but he did not keep his promise. He went around Rome half crazy, discussing with a fire that was but the will-o'-the-wisp's glow, political and military situations, sitting in judgment upon generals and ministers. But he could not feel even the solace of grief. This having hoped too much and suffered too much of the pettiest matters had left him insensitive to affairs of genuine moment. Ten years before, after the Calabria earthquake, he had gone to the scene; his travelling companions kept saying to him, "Just look, what a catastrophe! What destruction!" and he had answered, "Yes, yes," shaking

his head desperately. But in his heart he knew it was cold; he was unqualifiedly feelingless, "a criminal lack of feeling, that's what." And it required a little time before he really understood what had happened. Now, too, he heard and uttered words such as *terrible, horrible, traitors,* but his heart was not in them. Only when he learned that the retreat had ended and that the Italians had stopped at the Piave, did he feel a pang well up within him. And he wept freely.

Then he announced to everybody that he wished to get back into the ranks and take his place upon the banks of the Piave like Massimo Ranieri, who was going up and down the river delivering to the boys of '99 certain speeches that with all their stammerings, had more effect than those of a Cicero come back to life. Strangely enough, however, nobody, not even Eugenia, was moved by his words. They may have believed him, and maybe not; there was every reason for taking him seriously. But perhaps for the first time he felt that his will and his fate were weightless atoms in the dance through which the world was whirling.

He returned to Paris with this intention, though it had already grown lukewarm, and at once wrote to Celestine, announcing his visit on the eve of early departure for the front. He wished to see her amidst dramatic circumstances, so as not to leave her the leisure to speak about Caporetto and not compel her to repeat her condolences, which by letter were bearable but when spoken by the voice sounded like a lesson committed to memory. Perhaps,—he could not say exactly, —he was counting also upon something else; at least upon a lingering handclasp, with his palm upon the back of her hand, which would leave him an amber odour to perfume all the mists of the Piave.

But the next day Colonel De Sonnaz said to him:

"You want to go back to the front, do you? And why? In the first place you've done your duty, and your complexion's as yellow as a lemon. And then you're upsetting my office; you make the fellows who remain behind seem like slackers; and I'll have to send for another man and work

him in all over again from the beginning. Every man should stick to his post."

"But my post, Colonel, is in the front ranks. I was an interventionist, and therefore my duty is to be where the danger is greatest."

"Hear, hear!" And the colonel stroked his red beard with his fist. "So you were an interventionist, were you? I forgot. And you really think that you brought about this punishment from God, with all your fine speeches. Well, if that's the case, my dear fellow, just make us another fine speech, and give us victory and a just, enduring peace. When a fellow is omnipotent, what the devil!"

Yet the colonel was fond of him; he had even told him that, if he wished to leave Rome after the war was over, he would give him a promising position in his great corporation, the Adsum (Anonima De Sonnaz utensili meccanici—The De Sonnaz Mechanical Tool Co., Ltd.), where a hard-working, versatile chap like him could always be useful.

Filippo, without assenting, allowed himself to be prevailed upon, and remained in Paris. But he could no longer find his way to Madame Lambert nor the proper words to write to her. A couple of times he stopped short at the head of the bridge and turned back, as if beyond that point lay a road too greatly exposed to artillery fire. Another time he took out a sheet of writing paper the colour of a turtle-dove and wrote: "Madame and dear friend," then blundered about for a while without finding the words to follow, and his pen slipped from his hand, "as," he reflected sardonically, "Napoleon's did at Saint Helena."

At last, one January noon he came face to face with her under the arcades of the Rue Rivoli, and there was no escape this time. She was all enwrapped in otter, her nose barely visible, like an almond, and her eyes so blue, with golden glints, that they made the atmosphere radiant.

"What do I see? A ghost?"

"Yes," he replied, gazing straight into her eyes. "They didn't want to take me."

She gave him her hand, drawing it out of her cuffs like a jewel. And thus he was captured again.

The Trocadero soirées (that is what they were called), with an habituée more or less, were the same as those of the year before, except that the tunics were violet instead of red. Perhaps on this very account they struck Filippo as artificial repetitions of things formerly natural and living; and the French conversation, which once had refreshed him like the purling of Alpine rivulets, now maddened him, when he was weary, like the dry rattle of the castanets. But Celestine was as fascinating as ever, though imperceptibly less spirited; dearer than ever if, toward midnight—something that Filippo had never observed in the former days—she had not manœuvred with a hand bare of rings, half laughingly, to stifle a yawn that was too long for her mouth, like those of certain tiny babies.

Then came a torpid spring that was roused with a crash from its lethargy by the long range German guns. Folks, at the sound of the outbursts, which in the city struck like a gong, hastened on their way, and everybody seemed suddenly to have recalled an appointment for which he was late. Celestine packed up her children and governess, her cook, maid, tennis rackets, and the latest books, and transported everything on the second day to a country-house of hers near Chatenay, for the Paris apartment was too exposed. But, particularly in the early days, she would come two or three times a week to Paris for purchases and on errands, and, for more than any other reason, to breathe the air of the beautiful thoroughfares, where she felt like galloping like a filly over the meadows. For she was not afraid, and it was enough that she had placed her "four evangelists" in safety.

Filippo had no expectation of hearing her voice when, that morning, with his overcoat thrown over his pajamas, he went down to the vestibule to answer a telephone call. At first he did not recognise it. At a distance that voice lost its trilling gleefulness, and its timbre, filtered through space, faded into a chiaroscuro whose sadness contrasted enchantingly with the

futility of the words she spoke. She told him that she was coming within an hour to Paris for a supply of little things and for a fitting at the modiste; that she was fearfully bored to travel around alone; she wanted to know whether he had the time and the desire to act as her guide for a few hours and perhaps longer, in that city of perdition. It was not possible, at the moment, for him to find a way of escaping his work at the office, and he stammeringly answered No, entreating her to let him know a day ahead when she had such flattering intentions. In the days that followed he was able to be with her twice. They walked rapidly, exchanging few words. Often, a pace ahead of him, she would stop before a shop-window; she would point out various articles in her queer manner of extending all five fingers topped by her rose crystal nails instead of using only her forefinger; she would appraise the articles with a subtle understanding that at times broadened into almost professional comment (like that of certain head salesgirls), at which she herself, no sooner had she finished, would laugh heartily.

He managed to be excused from his office also on a morning in Holy Week when Celestine got the notion to take him to Saint Sulpice, where she knew the organist. They sat through mass in a gallery seat near the organ. In the deep nave only two colours were to be seen,—the mourning of the mothers and widows, and the horizon blue of the soldiers. When the music began Filippo offered no resistance to its spell. He dissolves into it. A narcotic coolness covered his forehead, like that which follows the evaporation of ether; words out of his forgotten maternal dialect flowed from his heart. His dead father, his mother and his sisters, his country, his companions in battle, his lost friends, the time that he had wasted, all the events of his tormented childhood and a youth now vanished in the clouds, rose before his vision; without colour, but clearly chiselled out of the shadows like phantoms from the beyond. Eugenia was ever so close to him, with her hand upon his shoulder. And there was he, without employment or purpose, forgetful of the house and the woman, far from the struggle, where it had been better for

him to have died. In a few days, certainly, a contest for life and death would take place upon the Piave, and he, strolling nonchalantly about Paris, would read the bulletins posted upon the corner of a kiosk, with all his feelings engulfed in a whirlpool of envy and shame, incapable even of pronouncing judgment upon himself and of deciding between the opinions of the physicians, who shook their heads when they had examined his lung, and the promptings of his own overwrought, turbulent conscience. But he knew that he was unfaithful, and he foresaw that once out of the church not a trace of this lofty turmoil would be left in his soul. So with all the more delight he surrendered completely to the flood of bitter mercy that poured from the organ pipes; he laved himself in its waters. He prayed, without a belief in God. The repressed tears drew in his cheeks, which were pale with guilt and expiation.

When, after mass they had issued into the cheerless April noon, it required a certain effort on his part to recognise himself and the things about him. Not Eugenia, his countrywoman, but Celestine, the foreigner, was at his side. The music had refreshed her like a tonic exercise, and now her face was as ardent as an Amazon's, and her lips deep red.

"How different we are!" she exclaimed. "Music just exalts me; and you're depressed by it. You must have suffered a great deal, my dear friend. Ah, D'Aubreville is a regular magician at the organ. You're extremely sensitive to music. I like that."

She placed her hand upon the back of his and then gently withdrew it. For a few minutes they walked beneath the bare trees of the Luxembourg that stood lazily in the mist and the gusts of wind, not quite trustful of the pale silver sun. As she walked along with him she vibrated with hidden muscular quiverings, like the pointer beside the listless huntsman.

"I'm going to luncheon now with my aunt Mlle. Catherine Lambert. But this evening I don't feel like going to Chatenay nor staying with any aunts. Where are you dining?"

"With you," replied Filippo, as he neither wished to do nor could have done otherwise.

She clapped her hands with joy, and a flock of sparrows flew off in the unearthly light.

"Excellent. Like two good comrades."

This, then, was the demigoddess Innocence, she who could remain faithful without virtue and could transgress without sin! And she was following a whim in the regular private cabinet of all bourgeois sinners, with the regular luncheon to be eaten "like comrades," outside the common dining-room of the restaurant, of course, that they might chat with less restraint and give folks no cause for gossip. But Filippo, on returning home, hardly thought of the collapse of his splendid, decorative image, but rather of a preference that all Paris, had it known, would have envied him. He had been gloomily fascinated by his intimate weeping at the Saint-Sulpice, and his heart throbbed with the certainty that he would find heaven knew what misfortune waiting for him in the mail. He found the regular letter from Eugenia, with her timid, industrious handwriting on the envelope and her capitals that extended somewhat too low beneath the line. Inside there were not only plaints but definite facts. All at a time. From Katzenau had come news that left no room for doubt: Marco was consumptive, and no one could say when the poor fellow would be let out, although Taramanna had at once brought the case to the attention of the government, and Father Mariani was using his influence at the Vatican to have the sufferer included in one of the first trains of seriously wounded. In the meantime her mother had made a scene, as at the first time, and had started to pack her trunks, so that, upon the advice of Bisi, it had been decided to intern her, with pious deception, in a sanatorium. "Poor mamma will thus be calmer and will be judged with less harshness. But the cost is high and papa is suffering cruelly at the thought that his promotion is delayed, and that when the war is over it's ninety chances out of a hundred that he'll be retired. How sad to think that even the end of the war should be feared as a misfortune by folks who have done no harm to anybody and wish evil to no one!" Filippo read the letter with a feeling of pity and of rage against his own fate. From the words that he

understood almost by spelling them out as he read, from the unperfumed sheet that smelled only of glue, there seemed to rise an odour of sickness, of dignified poverty, of handkerchiefs soaked in tears, something tasteless and colourless before which he passed scattering that other fragrance of illicit happiness, the odour of Celestine,—that of amber blended with lily of the valley. Suddenly a bomb exploded so near to where they were that it seemed as if it surely must have crashed through the roofs of the Louvre. He trembled.

Their appointment was for seven, at the Beaux Arts bridge. She stepped out of a hansom, her face wrapped in a thick veil. "Even a carriage in the old style," he thought. "And the veil, too! I've read of these things in Ohnet's novels."

He accompanied her to an old restaurant on the left bank; he preceded her up the stairs. The room had a very low roof. On the walls were hung a few old prints representing riding hunts, on the white table a vase containing a few primroses. It was almost cold. When Celestine removed her veil Filippo was surprised to behold the dear face of a pale and virtuous wife. Then it became fairly maternal.

"First of all," she said, "we mustn't spend too much or do anything foolish. Like good comrades. Who can tell what that plucked turkey of a waiter will think."

They ordered one of those incongruous, inconsistent suppers that women are fond of in perverse places: twelve green egriot cherries, a chicken wing, an apple à la Melba, a bottle of Sauterne, "the wine of prelates and dames."

He said "Yes, yes," and "Fine," and that this was exactly what he had felt like eating, and that she might order something else if she pleased, as otherwise she would leave the place famished. But she hardly raised even the first course to her mouth and all at once ceased eating, sitting back to watch his meal and clasping a knee between her interlaced fingers. The electric light beneath the white ceiling was too white.

"But what's up?" she asked, suddenly turning. "Good heavens, what a tragic face! Tell me, now," she added, looking into his shining cheek bones, "my poor friend, you are feverish."

"Listen . . ." he began, gazing back for the fraction of a second into her eyes, which were now the greyish hue of command. "Several times you've said that unhappiness disgusts you. Well, I must disgust you plenty. For I'm very, very unhappy."

"O la la," she answered impulsively, immediately correcting herself. "Let's hear about it, my dear friend. You know that you can count upon me. Sometimes it does a person good to confide in a friend."

And she resumed her light eating, with a soft tinkle of the knife and fork upon the porcelain.

"Listen . . ." began Filippo again. "This morning, after I left you, following that soul-rending music, when I got home . . ."

He told of Eugenia's letter. From this he went back to matters of the near and distant past, reconstructing his earliest days. It was hard for any one not intimately acquainted with his life to follow him. He ravelled and unravelled skeins of mad logic, denying all justification to himself, to others, to life. He accused himself of infidelity to ideas, of cruelty to his family, of iniquity against Eugenia; but he did not forget to say what he thought of his father's fatuous ostentation and of those who had remained behind at Calinni. Against Eugenia he had nothing to say, for she was an angel indeed, but an angel of death, lugubrious, repulsive, unbearable, repulsive, lugubrious.

Celestine left her chicken wing half eaten, and stared at him out of distended eyes, with her hand near the bell, fearing some excess or sudden attack. From the first she had tried to interrupt him and calm him. She wished to say to him, with regard to Eugenia: "But, see here, your actions aren't a bit nice, and you ought to marry her at once." She was even tempted to utter something coarse: "Come, now, you can't possibly be as you say, nor can your life have been such, either. You must have gone mad." But every time she curved her lip to interject a syllable, the flood of blind words rose darker and more swollen than ever.

His hair had fallen in disorder across his forehead. He

was speaking of his interventionism and of his faith in the war: all lost. He could no longer grasp its motives nor its aims Men had risen against men only to vent a sinister rage that could not otherwise be consumed.

"Listen, now," he began once more, wrapt in an ecstasy of annihilation. He was about to descend to the telling of that which he had confessed to no one but Eugenia, to denying the blood he had shed, to denouncing the courage that he had won, as it were, by brute force, by ambitious revenge, from the wretchedness of his flesh. He wished to conclude by saying that his soul was a mere rag ready to be thrown upon the heap.

But just at this moment the lights went out and all at once the heavy carts of the fire department were heard rumbling through the streets, as lugubrious as the hearses through a pest-ridden city, and then came the long ululations of the alarm sirens. This unexpected happening cut his words short. In a flash he understood that Celestine was breathing with relief as if delivered from a torture. He felt a great throbbing in his bosom, but it was not the terror of Novesa. There was terror here, too, but also eagerness for action and a mania for death.

They were silent. In a moment there was a discreet knock at the door.

"Who is it? What do you want?" demanded Filippo angrily.

"Have the lady and gentleman," came the waiter's plaintive voice, "candles and matches upon the table?"

"It doesn't matter," replied Filippo, in the same angry tones.

Then Celestine laughed with a laugh that might have seemed sardonic and malevolent. But that laugh, together with the darkness and the attention to what was happening outside, sobered him. And with almost phosphorescent eyes he beheld the madness and the ridiculousness of what he had done and said.

No sound of artillery fire reached their ears.

"Listen . . ." he resumed in a softer voice. Now he wished to tell her something quite different. He wanted to excuse

himself, to beg her pardon for having caused her suffering, to say that he was exhausted, ill, the victim of a passing delirium. Perhaps he wished to ask her for love and happiness.

"Hush, hush," she said, gently enjoining silence upon him, as if something solemn filled the air.

He had placed a hand upon her dress and could feel her round, sculptural knee. She removed it without any violence, and placing both her hands upon his eyes, closed them:

"So. You need sleep."

"Don't say that," he entreated. "Somebody else told me that, too."

"Very well, then, my little boy, whoever told you knew what he was talking about. You need sleep, rest. You're upset. This war is a horrible thing."

Her hands had become so incorporeal and soft that he was pervaded by a childhood abandon. He felt that she was a mother. The lights, turned on after the brief false alarm, blinded him. Carelessly he reached for his knife and fork as if to resume eating.

"Ah, no!" commanded Celestine, getting up and preparing to leave, her veil half down on her face. "On this point my physician is inexorable. When a person hasn't any appetite, he must not eat. That's a fundamental rule of hygiene."

And she hastened to open the window, letting in a wave of dark sky and cold.

"I was suffocating in this wretched den," she said, turning slightly around.

Despite the protection of the veil, he could see that her eyes were red.

"What's the matter? Was it I who? . . ."

"Oh, Good Lord, you did make me feel a bit badly. But no, don't think that. I never cried in my life. Of course, naturally I cried on my wedding day, when I embraced mamma. But every fashionable young lady does that."

Her laugh was a sigh.

"Just look at him!" she continued. "'Was it I who?' . . . Always he who . . . He, the great criminal. Let's look at

him! But tell me," and she raised his chin, "aren't you perchance a Spaniard? Aren't you the great-grandson or a great-grandson of the great-grandson of some Grand Inquisitor? . . . Don Felipe! . . . Up, my brave fellow. Let's go down for a breath of the cool air along the Seine."

He was hurrying over to the hook to take down his overcoat, when he recollected that there was a bill to pay. He called for the waiter.

But she had returned to the window and had thrust herself far out into the starless night, so that he should not see her face.

CHAPTER VI

He did not seek her out in the days that followed; on the contrary, he chose a different route from his house to the office, and from the office to his restaurant. He avoided the large thoroughfares through fear of meeting her. Three or four times he was transfixed with an eagerness for flight, as if some one were dogging his tracks; certainly not Celestine; but it seemed that some one was at his heels,—somebody with hollow cheeks, with eyes fixed straight ahead, with lower lip hanging, just as he himself had been when, far from the sight of others he had renounced control over himself and was sinking like a wreck into the bottom of his armchair, during the gloomy dusks of his furnished room.

He breathed more freely when he was told that Madame Lambert had retired to the château of a relative on the Loire, and that she intended to leave thence for the sea and then the Midi, not returning to Paris until the war should be over, or at least until her husband left the Salonika front. In the middle of summer he received a letter that he opened with laboured breathing. No address accompanied the date, and the stamp itself on the envelope happened to be illegible. The first and fourth pages were blank, on the second there were two verses in English and four others on the third. Celestine certainly couldn't imagine that he had learned English in four months? It was all he could do to get the sense of them, struggling with a dictionary and making discreet inquiries of this or that colleague and acquaintance. The first two read:

"Sweet Spirit, sister of that orphan one
Whose empire is the name thou weepest on. . . ."

The other four were:

"Oh, if ever you should meet me again,
In the light of a new April,
Look at me out of clear eyes
And in a strong voice, tell me your name."

He could not solve the riddle. He was positive that he had never told her, not even on that night at the restaurant, about the nameless soldier at Bisi's hospital, and his own obsession that he was like that wretched sufferer, having himself forgotten his own name. He could not understand how this foreign woman could have succeeded in discovering and scratching with her enamel nails so wounded a zone of his soul. The first two verses, which afterward he found in Shelley's "Epipsychidion," were utterly undecipherable unless they were meant as a mysterious, romantic reminder of the distant Eugenia.

And there were times now when he was certain that there was no suffering, no truth in that chimerical creature. In him, at least, there was some suffering. He tried to conjure up her image, to wean himself from beholding her too often before his vision, with her laughing eyes and her lips rounded in song. An insubstantial dream, like that of Mary, like that of happiness, or political fortune, or moral health! He was pleased when he noted that her features were beginning to lose colour and relief in his memory, to become generalised and photographical, such as those of a "celebrated beauty." Generally, during those weeks and months, he tried his best to reduce himself and the things about him to a transparent, insipid mediocrity, striving to feel himself one of so many in the crowd (not even the last of these, or the worst, which was in itself a manner of being ambitious), and to excel only at the office, since he had become decidedly the favourite of Colonel De Sonnaz. Only rarely was he struck with surprise at the contrast between his inner life, which was violent and luxurious to the point of suffocation, and his external life of every day and every hour,—that of a captain unsuited to the rigours of warfare, an unsuccessful lawyer, unable to work up a practice.

By September the winds of victory began to blow. Little by little even he felt the refreshing gusts upon his cheeks. The throngs of people in the streets seemed to sparkle with impatience, and the multitude was apparently on the point of dividing so as to make way for a procession of victory or for

the reception of a messenger from on high. At times a choral song would burst forth, only to wither like a premature flower, leaving an almost palpable quiver in the atmosphere. Filippo lengthened his usual strolls and now and then sauntered along aimlessly. His warrior's pride welled up. He would swell his chest amidst the passers-by; the indistinct hum of the multitude would become musical, or translate itself into words such as these: "Yes, indeed, we know. We know all about your bravery and your wound, even if it was less serious than those bloodless ones you carry inside. If we win, it's all due to you. There's be a reward for you, too." Thus he would be moved to compassion for himself, and it gave him pleasure to be unhappy.

He had in the meantime heard from Eugenia that her brother Marco had returned from Katzenau; that, with occasional relapses, he was a trifle better, and that if he had cared to remain in Italy he would be cured; but the poor fellow must return immediately to America for his wife and child, and there was nothing to be done but recommend him for a politico-journalistic mission that would allow him to embark before the coming of peace and demobilisation. He did not expect, however, to find himself face to face with Marco on the last day of October, returning after luncheon, and under such strange circumstances. Marco was on the landing before Filippo's door, with a long leg astride the balustrade.

"Why, what's this?" cried Filippo in amazement. "You here? But why didn't you go in and take a seat in my room? Or in the landlady's reception parlour?"

"It doesn't matter," replied the other, without moving his face, on which the hectic cheekbones simulated floridness, and smiling only with the corners of his mouth, while his eyes shone glassy behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Since I've been in Italy, and in Europe, I prefer the open air."

Filippo looked involuntarily at the smoke-coloured skylight.

"Come in, come in," he hastened to invite, sticking his key into the lock. "I'm so happy to see you again, and fairly

well recovered, I should say. Let me show you the way in."

"It seems to me," said Marco in the shadows, "that we might use the familiar form of address. Don't you think so?"

"Why not? Of course. I have been thinking of it for some time. Tell me, then. Are you leaving right away? Aren't you staying over in Paris for a few days. Surely?"

They had not yet shaken hands.

"*Che!* I take passage Monday for Bordeaux. I keep moving." And with a lingering emphasis upon the word, stretching out his hand where thumb and forefinger were clasped in a circle, he made a rapid gesture of a voyage without return.

Filippo busied himself with the window, opening it to let in more light or closing it to keep out the cold air, and solicitously removing a coat from the armchair where he wished the visitor to be seated. As he fussed about he spoke.

"So soon? Really? I'm sorry. Now that was really so thoughtful of you, so very thoughtful of you, to go out of your way to see me, when you're so pressed for time."

"It's not out of my way," explained Marco stolidly, as if he were giving a scientific explanation. "It's neither long nor short. During these days it's absolutely necessary to pass through Paris on the way to Bordeaux. I'm sorry, though, to disturb you. But I had a little errand to do."

He half rose out of the armchair and placed a soft package upon the table. Filippo carefully undid it.

"Oh, what an exquisite thought!" The package contained two hand-knitted sweaters of grey wool. "I'll wager it's a gift from Signorina Eugenia."

He coughed, at a loss how to go on.

"That's nothing," answered Marco, with the vainglorious precision of consumptives. "That's merely a habitual cough. It comes from the pharynx. But the sweaters will come in handy just the same."

"I should say! As for the cough, I'm optimistic about it myself. Professor Cherbuliez, who always sees the dark side of everything, has told me that if I take half decent care of

myself I can consider my lung quite safe. You can understand that I was mightily pleased? Eh?"

The other counterattacked with an unexpected move.

"My sister Eugenia is quite well and sends her greetings."

"I knew that. She wrote to me day before yesterday. No, it must have been four days ago. Five. I mean that I knew she was well. The confirmation of that report affords me great pleasure. And the regards as well. And papa, my former major?"

Now he had become pensive. With his contracted nostrils he sniffed the air to scent whether any feminine odour had been left by the office stenographer who had been his mistress for the past three months. He didn't at all fancy the notion of Marco's being seated in the armchair, which occupied the entire space between the couch beside the wall and the table near the bed, thus barring exit like the closed gate of a trap. And it was he who had sat Marco in the armchair!

"Listen," he resumed, opening the window again, and without waiting for any news about his former major. "I have to be back at the office immediately. I came here just to hunt up a document. I suggest that you meet me at closing time. We'll go off for a nice, informal supper."

"Che!" exploded Marco, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

Filippo recoiled, but the other, who had not even set his eyes upon him, came over close to him (so close that he might have been able to hear Filippo's heart beat), and shoved the passport that he had extracted from his pocket fairly under Rubè's nose.

"Do you see? It's pasted over with so many stamps and filled with so many signatures that you can hardly read it, and it looks like a leaf of old blotting-paper. And it's not complete yet. It's not valid. It's null and void. I was told on the train that it requires another visé. Now I must run from Herod to Pilate. And keep an eye on my baggage, which here in France and Italy is worse than among the redskins; there were politer folk at Katzenau. And to-night—wait a moment till I find the exact time,"—he pulled out the time-table,—"I leave for Bordeaux."

He repeated the half whistle and his gesture signifying a long journey.

"Very well. In that case I don't insist. Can I help you? By telephoning to the Embassy? Good Lord, couldn't you leave just as well to-morrow? Don't you like Paris? Haven't you ever been here?"

"Never. I prefer the sea air. It does me good."

"I see. As for me, I adore Paris, but for one who arrives under these circumstances, for the first time, in a certain state of health and spirits, on so dismal a day, I can see how it must be overwhelming."

"Overwhelming. That's the word. It must be too beautiful for me. I don't understand it. I prefer New York."

He smiled; it might have been with nostalgia. Filippo had been polishing his cap with his elbow, but Marco had stretched out at ease in the armchair.

"Then let me wish you bon voyage. At least you leave contented? I mean, as far as possible under the circumstances. Are your wife and child well? Do you draw a good salary?"

"Che!" (Filippo, though still very pale, felt the fear within him turn suddenly to fury. He could not endure this *che* that cracked with a sound between that of the castanet and the whip. He could stand nothing in Marco, and less than anything else, this rough, sickly resemblance to his sister, that air of a family with a degenerate mother and a half crazy father.)—*"Che!* That kind-hearted meddler of a Taramanna procured me a passport, a mission, and the travelling expenses. It's funny, all right. Tuberculosis has always been an export product of the United States. Now I'm importing it. Free of duty! But one thing I'm sure of, and that is, that I must get rid of it there. The fact is, that my paper couldn't wait for me to edit it from Katzenau. So they took another fellow within reach. In short, wife and child are in hard straits. How do you Neapolitans do?"

"I'm not a Neapolitan."

"Don't you folks from the south do this, too?"

He mimicked the gesture of appetite with his two fingers like a deaf mute before his open mouth.

"Oh. Then it would have been better," said Filippo, for the first time moved to sympathy, "if you had never come to Europe"

"So-o-o. And where would I have found such a show as this? You can't see its like if you live a hundred years. And I'm leaving just when the bet is won. Do you call that little? We're winning We're winning!"

He rubbed his hands.

"And then," he added, darkening, "the honour of the family was involved. . . . By the way . . ."

This time he arose and drew from his wallet a printed visiting card.

"Here is my address. No, not that at the right. That's the paper. Mine's at the left. Yes, Brooklyn. Write to me there. Or telegraph me. I really would like to have you telegraph me when you marry."

"Why, what do you call this?" Filippo had now raised his voice. "Eugenia knows very well . . ."

"Eugenia has nothing to do with it. The night before I left I took her face between my hands, I looked into her eyes so, and said to her, 'Matters between you and Signor Filippo stand thus and so, don't they?' What could she say? She swallowed her saliva and closed her eyes. Then she asked me to take these sweaters to you and not say a word to you about anything. And she tried hard to be brave. I've brought you the sweaters and I haven't said a word to you. What harm have I done?"

"Eugenia knows very well that we'll marry as soon as the war is over. The harm you've done is this: that with your superfluous meddling you rob me of the pleasure of doing spontaneously what had been decided upon from the very first moment."

"Ah, pleasure! What things are done for pleasure? Up to now it's never happened to me to do anything for pleasure. I didn't come to Europe for pleasure; not a bit of it. Do you think I drank the Katzenau soups with pleasure?"

He laughed drily. His grimace, which he had learned together with his other gestures in the depots, and which looked

rather strange upon an Americanised face, was so comical that Filippo was forced to laugh in company with him. At the first corner they separated after having exchanged the regular kisses upon the cheek.

But, since Filippo insisted upon preserving even before himself the appearance of a free decision, he delayed several weeks before he presented himself to the colonel, and, standing at exaggerated attention, said to him:

"Colonel, I accept."

"Agreed. You waited till the very last minute. On the fifteenth of December I draw up my office report. I'll have you exempted and you can come with me."

He extended his hand to Filippo across the desk.

The understanding was that Filippo should receive a fixed salary, seven hundred lire per month, and that his duties were to be somewhat elastic: legal consultation, revision of contracts, service as a connecting link between the directors and the personnel, delicate secretarial tasks to which he was suited by the promptness and the skill he had revealed in Paris and the experience he had acquired. He would get along well with the colonel's brother, Adolfo, who was the head, the will, and the moving spirit of the firm, while he, Roberto, was but the eye, the scientific intelligence. It was only a humble position, but the right man could go far. Roberto reckoned that the work would require but four or five hours of Filippo's day at most, except when he should have to visit the Bovisa or the Intra office. If he desired, he still had time to spare for trying his professional fortune at Milan. As for politics, it was better not to think of it at present.

That night he could not remain in his room amidst the books where he sought a life worth imagining, since his own was so wretched to live. It was the end of the week. Every Saturday night, just before midnight, leaving open upon his table the volume by Stendhal, by whom he had been intoxicated as by a sublime absinth, he would go to the window and stay there until he had caught sight of his stenographer, who was returning from the nocturnal labours which paid for her

silk stockings. Then he would go down and open the door for her and accompany her ill-humouredly up the stairs. This night, however, he felt the need of the rainy atmosphere and of less illusive solitude than his reading afforded. He gazed toward the banks of the Seine; all at once his desire for withdrawal was inundated by the flood of the mob, as slow and potent as that of a river through a plain. Everybody was thronging toward the Rue de la Paix, the Place de l'Opéra, the great boulevards. Yes, he knew. It was the long Celebration of Victory. Every holiday evening the fires of joy would be renewed with fresh fuel. That night there was still another reason for high spirits, for a king had come to Paris.

As in a vision he beheld the flags of every nation hanging limply from every window, faded by the downpour, which only now was ceasing. But the sky was black. He heard the bands and the singing, he saw the dancing around the bare trees. It seemed like the nocturnal festival of a people, of humanity itself, and as vast as the war. He was particularly struck by a group that had gathered spontaneously into a beautiful sculptural composition at the entrance to the Métro on the Place de l'Opéra. A war cripple was playing on the violin the song of Madelon. He could not catch the other words, but that soft, warm call to Madelon! Madelon! suffused him with a sad joy. After every repetition the violinist would carry around a little plate. Then he would begin all over again. A mother was dancing a child of hardly three years.

"Now these people," he said to himself as he walked along toward the Rue Royale, "are happy. Who says that it's an illusion? They are happy. And why did the war come if not because every people and every person was seeking happiness upon earth? Everybody hurled himself upon his neighbour because he was sure that his neighbour with his body was depriving him of a share of the sun. I, too, wanted the war, and waged it, because I was discontent and looking for air. But the war has accomplished one good, just purpose: it has shattered all the hovels. I was a hovel in '14;

now in '18 I'm a heap of ruins. I took it into my head that there was no room on earth except for the leaders, for the first one. I clutched after the heights, and grabbed—unhappy me!—a little wisp of grass, and I was left forever at the same spot, a half failure, lacking in humanity. Now I'm at the top, worse than a half failure, worse than lost; a complete failure, rejected. I have lost the war. Oh, why are these people singing and dancing; why are they happy, while I can't even weep and cry Mamma? Whom am I to call to account for this infamy?"

He would really have shouted had he been able. He would have pointed his fists to heaven.

But at that moment, as he thought and said these nonsensical things to himself, a real cry startled him, a scintillant, multiple cry of joy, like a string of silver bells. A woman dressed in red came running across the street like a pursued nymph.

Hallucinated by a dazzling association of ideas, he brought a name to his lips:

"Celestine!"

But not so low that the woman did not hear, and turn rapidly around upon the sidewalk, ceasing her cries.

"My name isn't Celestine. My name's Diomira."

She held her hands upon her hips, and smiled a broad, stupid smile that did not fill her wasted cheeks but parted her lips, revealing three gold teeth.

"And yours? What are these three stars that look like the mark of good cognac? Are you Portuguese?"

"No. I'm Italian."

"Very well. Viva l'Italia! Let's go by-by, hein?"

She took him by the arm, but he freed himself brusquely. Whereupon she resumed her way, shouting, toward the sidewalk she had left:

"Celestine! The Portuguese fellow is looking for Celestine! They're hunting for you, Celestine!"

The name of Celestine struck against the pavement like the splash of mud when a heavy wagon rumbles by.

Overcome by shame, he turned almost in flight around the corner into the Rue des Capucines. He looked at his wrist-

watch. It was just past midnight. He reached the door to his house exhausted.

Huddled together like a child who has been chased away, with her head just visible in her black fur coat, the stenographer was waiting near the entrance.

"Susanna," called Filippo, making his voice as kindly as possible. "Were you waiting for me? Am I late?"

"I should say so. I thought you'd found a better one. I was hopping mad and just about to leave."

She pretended to weep, so that she should not cry in earnest. She was cold.

Under the cuffs of her sleeve he sought her closely-trimmed finger-tips, hardened by typewriting. He bent over her eyes, which were as expressionless as those of a domestic animal, seeking charity within them.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

It was but a short time after midnight toward the middle of December when Filippo Rubè, now definitively in civilian clothes, arrived in Milan. But the city that he did not know and the Italy to which he was returning after more than a year of absence, were so different from Paris that, as he came out upon the square before the station, he was strongly impelled to turn right around, as if he could go straight back the way he had come. The arc lamps shone pallidly in the sticky fog, and the stream of travellers pouring down the staircase dissolved into a lake of translucent darkness. He could almost have believed that he had arrived in the wee small hours at the Montparnasse district, in one of those eccentric Parisian quarters where it seems that the brilliant haunts of the boulevards are a thousand miles away and the closed houses tower in the empty streets.

There were no more carriages to be had. The few that had awaited the arrival of the train had been seized by the more alert. Filippo hired the first porter that came his way; the fellow placed the bag on his head and acted as guide. Now to find a room at a hotel! The hotels on the square were either filled or pre-engaged. He had muttered to his porter, between his teeth, "second class hotel," and had felt his bosom pocket to make sure of the wallet containing three thousand three hundred French francs, his entire post-war treasure, which he would like to leave intact as long as possible.

And thus the exploration continued, in zig-zag fashion, through streets that Filippo considered secondary; his man, surmounted by the bag, strode in front, and he behind. A couple of times he would reach a door almost at the same time with another traveller, and would suddenly hasten his gait so as to be the first to press the button. His rival was not in the slightest degree perturbed, and entered at ease,

when the door had swung its complete arc on the hinges, behind the hurrying one who had sneaked into the first chink with the agility of a cat. The other man was known, and in a loud voice they gave a number. He, Filippo Rubè, amidst the dismal light that suggested a police-headquarters vestibule, asked:

"Is there a room with bed?"

"No. Did you make reservations?"

"No. Is there anything?"

"Nothing. All full, even in the reading room."

After the second time that he had heard this story, he thought: "I didn't make reservations. I have never made reservations upon anything in life. I arrive late and I can't find any lodgings." The sentence echoed for a long time in his thoughts, alternating with another that he had for some time forgotten: "I didn't learn to swim on Long Island."

On the Via Castelfidardo, a man in a cap and without a collar, and a bare-headed young woman, were clutching at a ground-floor railing behind which stood a clerk on duty.

"Come on, be a good fellow," entreated the man, in a voice that could certainly sing. "Even a tiny bed. Accommodate us. Even in the garret."

The clerk shook his forefinger and replied No.

"Where are we to go?"

"Why! There are the benches in the public parks."

The man and the young woman, who up to now had stood arm in arm, separated at the moment in which they left the railing, and continued meandering on their way, like two birds resuming flight with a dry beak, and directing their steps in despite of themselves toward the public gardens, as if they had taken the clerk's advice seriously. It was clear now that the man was no longer eager to have the woman on his hands, and that they had begun to hate each other a little; Filippo drew pleasure from the observation. He ran toward the window as the clerk was closing it, and asked:

"Sh! Sh! Is there a room for me?"

"Nothing. Sorry. You heard."

The silent porter kept walking ahead. When they reached

a gate he would put the bag on the ground, with a little sigh, then press the button a long time, blow upon his finger tips and stand to one side. Then once more on the march, without the slightest noise on his part, as if he were walking on the tips of his toes. But Filippo's footsteps struck cold and hard against the asphalt, and he accompanied them with a mental count: "One, two." For months and months he had not felt so close to war life. At times he seemed to be instructing his feet: one, two; if the shadow of a garden fell upon the deserted street, he pictured himself upon night patrol duty. Yes, that was how the great war had been waged; with neither sun nor banners, without songs, unless the obscene shout of the drunkard on the corner had been a song; in a way it might even be said without the sound of combat, for, upon careful recollection, the real, keen struggle was a matter of every day, in the "good season," for the slacker who read the bulletin, but was not more frequent than the tempest in a low sky for the men buried alive in their trench holes. There were millions upon millions of mute dwarfs, half underground, scratching the soil with their nails and surrounded with dynamite enough to explode the world. And it hadn't exploded! A bare roof, belonging to a house that rose into the clouds, seemed like an inaccessible mountain to him. How? Must it be taken? "Fire at it!"

"It's easily understood why that tramp and his streetwalker" (he thought a harsher word) "shouldn't have found a place. But I? I, who am returning from the front? To be sure, at this particular moment I am returning from Paris, but I'm coming from the front. I'm no tramp, and I haven't with me a . . . I'm a combatant, I am; they shot me through a lung, by God. Even if I don't happen to cough any more. And to think that those flashy merchants with their dancing paunches and wallets that stick through their coats, those business men who prowl around the battle camps like jackals, should have found a place! That they've all made their reservations! And I, not! A fine way to receive the saviours of western civilisation. I'm hungry. I'm sleepy.

"What sort of a victorious country is this? What kind of

triumphant city? You can't see from your mouth to your nose. We're still in the midst of the war. No dancing, no singing. Ha, a lighted window. Must be some one dying from Spanish fever. They've told me that it's wreaking havoc. If it should ever catch me with my injured lung, I'm a goner. They put the corpses into sacks. The pest. Or else it's a couple making love. A wedding night. For instance, my wedding. Closed houses, closed shops, bars and locks. It must be three rather than two. But it seems impossible that daybreak should ever come."

And thus he was musing to himself when, turning into the Via Manzoni, he felt himself the cynosure of a glance that held him. Some one passed him hurriedly, suddenly turned about, looked him square in the face, and then took possession of him by planting a hand upon his shoulder. He shuddered from head to foot as if a wet blanket had been thrown over his naked body, and his shudder increased rather than diminished when he saw who it was that thus gave him his first welcome to the new city. It was Garlandi.

"Look who's here! Rubè!"

"Garlandi! Weren't you taken prisoner? At Caporetto?"

"Caporetto, Caporetto. Old times. It's now Vittorio Veneto, didn't you know? And where are you coming from? Certainly I've been a prisoner, and I've learned German, but as soon as the chance came I took to my legs, and partly on foot, partly by railroad, I reached home most unexpectedly and Black threatened me. The others had to go through Lord knows how many holes, concentration camps, interrogatories, and what not. Not I, that misfortune didn't happen to me. I have my entrée and rose upon the ladder of honour. That's a month old already. I tell you! I fought until they saw that they were in a trap, and there's nothing to be said. But what's the matter? Are you enchanted? Can't you move?"

Filippo unwillingly walked a few steps with him. The porter followed along.

"And weren't you ill there?"

"Ill? And why should I be? There's a fine one for you.

You haven't changed a bit. You're just as queer as ever you were. Gloriously wounded, I see, and with a blue ribbon. I want one, too, for it's coming to me. So you're at Milan, are you? Going into business?"

"No. . . . Yes. It's a complicated matter. Uncertain."

"Well, I am. Any fellow who doesn't get rich in these days has something wrong in the head. What am I to answer my son, if I ever have one, when he says to me: 'Idiot of a father, you were in the war, you risked your hide, and you didn't even become a millionaire?' I'm on the road now. Yesterday evening I had a chance meeting on the train; then I had to accompany him to the door of his house, the devil's own house, to play a game of *assotti*, which with the exchange at its present status will bring a fortune."

"A game of *asso* . . . ?"

"*Assotti, assotti.* And where are you carrying that bag? You coming to the Continental, too?"

"Are you going to the Continental? Where is it?"

"Yes. About a hundred paces from here. I've ordered my room."

"Reserved it?"

"Reserved, ordered, isn't it the same thing? What a queer duck! Are you coming along? What's the trouble with you? You seem to be wandering."

"I made no reservations. It must be filled."

"Come along, you'll be cared for. I stand in well with the proprietor. There's always room for a fellow that can use his elbows."

And he pulled Filippo along by the sleeve. Filippo, however, freed himself, saying that he had been given a more comfortable address for his affairs, and that he wouldn't be able to sleep with the noise of the street-cars, and other impossible excuses; he disappeared down the Via Monte Napoleone. The real reason he did not wish to stop at the Continental was because he knew it was a first-class hotel, but he would not have gone there even had he been as wealthy as a nabob. The oozing greyness of the Milanese night had, from the very first instant of this strange meeting, parted be-

fore his vision, revealing the red afternoon on the Carso and that road to Monfalcone, with its limestone dust where lay the soldier Rametta like a bundle of rags. How many times, as that Garlandi had breathed confidentially into his face, had Rubè wished to cry out: "Assassin! Not so much because you have killed, as because you have forgotten!" The mere thought of lying next door to that man, listening to his quiet, contented breathing, gave him a shudder that he could not be sure was just, but it was surely impossible to overcome.

Finally he found lodgings in a house which, even at that hour, reeked of American fat. The clock in the porter's lodge showed about half past one. It didn't seem possible. It seemed as if he had been living through a day of battle. A single room was left, with two beds, at fourteen lire. He got rid of the porter, after an altercation, placing twelve lire into his hand. Fourteen and twelve, twenty-six. He could have taken a place in the best hotel and the next day give the De Sonnaz brothers an address of which he need not be ashamed. After he had been left alone behind the attendant who showed him up the gloomy staircase, he made a mental reckoning and commented upon it with a soundless laugh that extended like a sneer to his ears.

He awoke early, overcome with disgust. The ground-glass windows opened upon a filthy courtyard and reflected from it a prison-like light. At once he sought out a cheaper and more decent lodging. He wrote to the mayor of Calinni and to a priest friend of his, requesting letters of introduction. He explained to his mother that he was marrying a girl from the best of families, fairly well off, very beautiful, whom he had come to know intimately as the nurse who had cured his wound. In the meantime he was settling in Milan, which was thenceforth the virtual capital of Italy, and where he hoped to find a richer clientèle and enter upon a successful business career. He would come later to Calinni with his wife, surely not later than spring, to embrace his mother and sisters and to present to them their new daughter-in-law and sister-in-law, and also to verify *de visu* the intentions harboured by his friends con-

cerning his candidacy; for the elections, though not imminent, were not on the other hand years away. He wrote likewise to Eugenia, asking her to make all arrangements while he looked around for an apartment.

This was at noon. In the afternoon he was in a hurry to change his French money and at once to deposit the greater portion in a bank, afterward presenting himself to the directors of the Adsum company. It seemed to him that the tram which carried him with its tinkling toward Ponte Seveso, lingered on the way and stopped here and there for no reason at all. He was impatient to find security, protection, and that good colonel of his whose warm welcome should solder this discontinuity to the life at Paris. He was almost thirty-five years old and had learned nothing. Naturally there was no outburst of applause from the door-keeper and the clerks as he crossed the corridor; and he had to sit around the anteroom for three quarters of an hour before he was admitted into the presence of the engineer Roberto, who had been in Milan only five days and had as many things to see to as there were hairs in his head, and thus could grant him but five minutes. He wished him welcome, but in the same tones as one wishes another good-day. He seemed to have changed, to be more distant, more circumspect, more manifestly "superior," than when he had been a colonel. It even seemed to Filippo that he stroked his red beard less frequently.

"You can employ these first days in putting your things in order. You'll begin service with the new year. In the meantime look for lodgings. Have you already found them? Very good, you were quick. Temporary? Well, still, that's better than nothing. There's nothing definitive in this world of ours.

"For the rest," he concluded, in explanation of his haste, "you'll have more to do with my brother than with me. Come in, one of these mornings, at your convenience, about ten, and I'll introduce you. As you know, I take charge exclusively of the technical part."

But Filippo had no patience, and he let only one day go by, so as not to appear over eager. The following day he presented himself. He crossed the threshold of the director's

office with head erect, though somewhat intimidated by the presence of Adolfo De Sonnaz, whom he knew from hearsay as one of the most famous captains of industry among the younger generation, not yet at his apogee, but on the way, as the hasty prophets predicted, to becoming a power comparable to certain American paragons. Even Roberto never named him without lowering his voice obsequiously, although he was Adolfo's senior by some fifteen years. Adolfo was a son by another mother, and markedly different from his brother. He had a pale brown complexion, a fine oval face, and an imposing forehead; his teeth, however, were defective, and he whistled his s's through them. His eyes were usually dull, but at will he could suddenly ignite them, and then they sparkled.

"I'll give you an immediate proof of my trust in you," he said, after a few curt, conventional phrases, "by expounding my point of view. I believe that many of my colleagues cherish the delusion that the war was illness and that peace is health. The war, on the contrary, was a sort of somewhat exalted health, and peace, after-war conditions, will be a tremendous depression. Everywhere, you'll understand, but in Italy somewhat worse than anywhere else, for our nation is weak, and there are wretches in our own house who would like to defraud us of the fruits of victory. If we don't give thought mightily quick to soldering our links and pulling in our reins, the social order and the prosperity of our industries will go through some bad quarter hours. Metallurgy, naturally, is among the most seriously threatened industries. I'm not speaking of myself personally; you may feel well assured that I'm in a safe position, and that whenever I please I can leave the country and continue making millions wherever I wish. It's the country that's in such a bad fix. Already I see that there's no will to work at all, and that Bolshevik notions are flooding us. Very well, then, we'll learn to know each other better. You're starting in on the 2nd of January? You'll know Signor Valsecchio, my secretary, very soon,—an excellent person; somewhat old. Whatever he does, he

does as well as it can be done, but he belongs to a more leisurely day. For the rest, you'll have varied duties. No, don't ask me. As yet I don't know just what they'll be exactly. My brother has recommended you to me as a useful person and I'm putting you to the test. The important thing now is to get well acquainted with your colleagues, the personnel of the firm, get into the running, become familiar with the work. The rest will follow. For the present I'm giving you seven hundred lire per month, which is merely a probational salary, enough for a single man to live on decently. For the future, I promise nothing. I never promise. I maintain him who maintains me. Industry is the science of *do ut des*. You know, of course, that you're on a three months' trial?"

After this little speech had come to an end, he leaned against the arms of his chair as if he were about to rise, then added:

"Have you anything to say to me?"

Filippo, who desired to exchange confidences with him and thus enter into his good graces, replied:

"I should like to ask your advice on something. Inasmuch as I am getting married in a few weeks, and am a stranger in Milan, I should like to know whether you advise me rather to seek an unfurnished apartment—three or four rooms—or a furnished one?"

"I?" And his face grew long, while his eyes, so dull up to now, sparkled like firebrands. "You'll find neither furnished nor unfurnished, in all likelihood, or have to pay all your month's salary as rent. I'd advise you not to marry. Not at present."

At this juncture he burst into a laugh that seemed to come from some other man, so guttural and ventral it sounded in comparison with the pronunciation of his words, which was clear and concise, despite his defective s's. Filippo was perturbed, and it occurred to him that his employer had assumed the defensive in anticipation of a request for a rise in salary owing to marriage.

"But my bride-to-be," he said, repeating in the same words

the lie that he had written to his mother, "is fairly well off."

"Oh, in that case, so much the better. Then look for a furnished flat. And accept my congratulations."

As he said this, however, he scrutinised Filippo with a deceitful glance, and without knowing why, did not believe what he had just said. Filippo, too, left in discontentment with himself and the meeting. What did that shark want? To place him as a spy amongst the employees and the tradesmen? Impossible, for the colonel knew that he was not the man for such ignoble services. Then he repeated to himself the vague, commonplace remarks that the younger brother had made to him about reins to be pulled in and social orders to be preserved. A strange profession was this, after ten years of study and privations, and so much conscientious toil! A guardian of the social order during the post-bellum period! He was amused by the recollection of an equally estimable profession, the title of which he had read, years before, in a comic journal: vendor of smoked glasses for viewing eclipses.

These momentary distractions were dispelled, however, by the fear of not having made a good impression upon De Sonnaz and of not taking root in the Adsum. The idea of attempting once more without any fixed position, to establish himself as a lawyer in Rome, after three and a half years' interruption, and with a wife to support (for the meagre rent and the income from the Berti property were swallowed up by the sanatorium that housed Signora Giselda), terrified him more than the crossing of a field exposed to fire. He felt himself pricked by a thousand pins at the thought of leading a beggarly existence in a city where nine tenths of his acquaintances were men of wealth and position. The important thing, then, was to win the confidence of the De Sonnaz brothers. He set about this with might and main, employing the one virtue of his that he knew was irresistible—his zeal. With this he had conquered Taramanna and the colonel at Paris, with this he hoped to conquer his new chief. To begin with, he gave no heed to what Roberto had told him—that he could accomplish his Adsum work in four or five hours of the day, and that during the rest of the time he could busy himself with other

affairs. His ambition was this: to associate himself with a Milanese lawyer and renew his relations with Taramanna, who was a loyal friend and who could employ him as agent and representative for cases in Upper Italy. At Milan, whoever struck his stride made a quick job of it, and there wasn't the danger of the unnerving hustle and bustle of Rome. Once he was settled where and how he wished, he could shake off the yoke of this humbling industrial position with a simple shrug of his shoulders.

Very well; but he must take his time,—just those three months of probation. For the present he must build himself a nest in the shelter of that chimney and not endanger his daily bread. Wherefore he was in the office all hours of the day, and drudged away like a college-student before the final examinations. He bothered no one; he recalled, however, that he was not to "get too intimate" with his colleagues, and Valsecchi would greet him ceremoniously, bowing and stepping aside to let him pass, and raising his thick, tremulous hand to the brim of his cap, but without looking him squarely in the face. As a result, De Sonnaz would have to realise that in a few weeks Rubè had poked his nose everywhere and knew as much about the business as an experienced man. Three days at the Bovisa plants were sufficient for him to describe them in a "pithy report," the approximate technical exactness of which was remarkable for a lawyer. With increasing frequency he was called to the commendatore's office, and entrusted with charges of exquisite superfluity that were sought out with lanterns, but more often his employer asked after the political news. De Sonnaz ran through the columns of the *Corriere* while he drank his coffee and milk, and so had no time to keep up with events. The prospective velocity with which Filippo abstracted the happenings and the opinions of the day was evidently appreciated, although he never received a word of praise for it, except one which struck him as of ill omen: "You'd make a first-class journalist." Something treacherous and unpersuasive was always present in the white, enveloping glance with which his employer, after having dismissed him, would follow him to the door.

He wrote now every day to Eugenia, and his letters were growing love-laden,—so much so, that at first she found it hard to understand. It was hardly needful to talk about apartments, even if he had had the time to hunt around diligently. But the delay caused by formalities provoked him, and he was on tenter-hooks as if he had never wished for anything but this marriage. So he contented himself with renting a bridal room with a sort of parlour in a boarding-house—and even these rooms weren't available until the fifteenth of February,—the whole thing to cost thirty-five lire per day, which amounted to one thousand fifty per month, which in turn was exactly one and a half times the amount of his salary, just for food and lodging. Filippo, who had always felt a panicky fear of running behind, this time faced it with lowered head. For three or four months the bank book sufficed and more, until Eugenia should find a few furnished rooms involving less expenditure, and then, surely, in three or four months something new would turn up.

When she read these ardent sweetheart's letters, each numbered with a decreasing figure that represented the days left between the date of the letter and the fifteenth of February, Eugenia's heart would leap in her bosom as with a joy so great that it could turn to pain. Her trousseau was all white, in the old style. As to money,—nothing, and she received as dowry the bare property of the tiny house at Rocca di Papa, which she could rent out at two thousand per year, at the new prices, if it should be leased; but only too justly the colonel reserved to himself the usufruct of the property, for now that he was pensioned off and alone he wished to retire to that spot.

"Unless," he would say to his daughter, "you find me a place at Milan. I'd even be satisfied to take a secretarial position; anything in preference to this boredom."

During the last days, when they were dismantling that dark but beloved apartment on the Via Merulana, which they were sub-letting to others, there was plenty of sadness and hard work. The furniture, to be sure, passed into Eugenia's hands, and she could take them out of storage as soon as she found a house in Milan; but in the meantime, who'd pay the

bills? The hardest moment of all was the farewell visit to her mother in the sanatorium near Sant' Agnese. The old woman —now she was really and irremediably old—had become a prey to a single obsession: love and talk of love. Among other things, she averred that a captain in the Savoy cavalry guards, thrice decorated for bravery, had shot himself through love of her, only a month ago upon the Sant'Agnese station platform. The doctors would have let her out, however, if the family desired it. Berti privately harboured that wish, for in her own home Signora Giselda would cost but a third of what they now paid for her care, and thus he would be able to come to the assistance of Eugenia; moreover, during the past thirty years, he had become accustomed to his wife's company and to her poetic discourses, and despite all the inconveniences to which her presence would subject him, he preferred them to a neglected, lonely old age. These thoughts, however, he kept to himself, for never would he have dared to confess this intention to sink into the ridiculous, and he feared public opinion. Perhaps, who could tell, at Rocca di Papa, after his daughter's marriage.

When Signora Giselda received news of the approaching marriage, she gravely expressed her intention of accompanying Eugenia to Milan in fulfilment of her maternal duties, and as her daughter and her husband, having exchanged inquiring glances, sought excuses for opposing such a course, she wept in tender offence, screamed as long as her breath held out, and at last calming down, revenged herself in cold blood, saying:

"Very well, I surrender my rights. Besides, what sort of marriage is this? So I'll not even place the white veil over your face, and the orange blossoms? You must understand that this is a keen disappointment for a mother."

In that month and a half the colonel felt a certain void in his consciousness. The world had changed; what sense was there to such a marriage, away from home, so hurried, almost without an engagement, and a bride going off in quest of her groom? He said to her:

"Do you know, it strikes me that your Rubè is a queer fellow, a bit moody."

"Oh, papa," replied Eugenia, "I'm hardly as gay as a chaffinch myself."

Or else he would ask:

"At least he loves you dearly?"

"Of course, of course he loves me dearly. How many times have I told you that already? Why should he marry me if he doesn't love me dearly? For my wealth?"

"But he's not a brilliant match, just the same. Lord knows how hard he'll have to toil before he makes himself a secure position."

"No, not at all. You'll see,—everything will go well."

"I'm glad you're satisfied. . . . But you deserved better. You're so good and so beautiful. May God bless you, my daughter."

"Oh, papa, I'm no baby. I'm almost twenty-eight, you know."

Now, after Giselda's gibe, the colonel, too, saw more clearly. He followed Eugenia mutely down the white stairs; mutely he waited, with bowed head, for the tram. He said not a word more and did not retract his promise to be present at the ceremony.

Eugenia left three days ahead, because Mary wanted to see her again at all costs. La Rustica was closed. Signora Adriana had died of heart-trouble, suffering intensely because she was not able to imitate the exemplary serene death of her husband.

"Father Mariani," she muttered, clutching her bosom, "Giulio was more Christian than I. And he was only a deist. I can't resign myself to going. And then, and then . . ."

She made a disconsolate semicircular gesture, which signified that she was not a whit content with the way in which she was leaving things. The war was not yet over. It might yet be lost. Mary was still a stranger to her, less than nothing, incapable of exerting "even the slightest beneficial influence" upon her husband. That fellow had lost "every guiding standard of life," and he would have done better to give away his surgical instruments to some indigent student, for

they looked as gloomy as trophies of an African hunt hung in a paralytic's home. Juja herself gave her great concern, with that little face of an angel in white terra-cotta, and those pellucid, wandering eyes that seemed as if they never should attain the age of discretion, remaining forever thus among the dolls and the coloured English albums.

Federico, who had abandoned science because he could not see what the physicians and the surgeons were going to do with their powders and their gauze when there were so many high explosives and asphyxiating gases ("pain is as deep as the sea, and the scientists imagine they can bail it out by the tumblerful"), decided, close upon the death of his mother, to abandon Rome as well. A short time before he had recalled that he owned a few lands, one place in particular that had always been the subject of his mother's praise, situated somewhat beyond Arezzo. "The best thing would be," he said, "to raise a little corn and a few chestnut trees. Land is genuine." He would make every clod productive; and the sole luxury he permitted himself was to leave La Rustica empty and untouched, with the tanagra at the windows, the pictures covered, the carpets rolled up. He sent after him four cases of books on philosophy, religion, and agriculture, but did not open them until he had received, from Florence, the bookcases with opaque glass panes, which he had ordered so that no one could poke a nose into his affairs. Of what was going on in his soul he spoke even to Mary only through allusions; she had accustomed herself to the silence, and went about the house noiselessly, huddling herself at night in her cold bed that was three rooms distant from where Federico slept. One might have said that she was waiting for her day, the day on which Federico should discover "certainty." For Federico had once, in the presence of Father Mariani, made the remark:

"I'd like to have so many children, too,—a regular patriarchal family of seven, nine, ten. But only when I'd have something exact and precise to teach to those children,—when I had discovered a certainty. I'd want to be able to tell them

why I brought them into the world,—to know, at least, what life is."

"At least!" repeated Father Mariani, laughing. "You are discreet."

"And Juja?" asked Mary, turning a deep red.

"Juja is another matter, and can live as she is. Juja is a sort of souvenir of the days before the war. Juja is joy."

From that day onward they had called the child Gioia (Joy); another reason was that now the child was sticking her tongue against her palate in an effort to pronounce the complex consonant with which her name began. No restrictions were placed upon her, and her authority was certainly greater than that of their friends, of Federico's wife, of his mother (even the poor Adriana had been piqued), for she alone had been able, and very simply, to induce her father to get himself a wooden leg. For one summer evening, hopping into his study on one foot, she had said:

"Juja walk one foot like her papa."

Now, on the Tuscan slope, her rapid laughter was the sole reminder of joy in this house that was besieged by the winds.

This place was really rustic, with its odour of linseed oil, with its deep closets and the fireplaces where they could burn the trunks of old chestnut trees. They would think later, in good season, about remodelling it. In the meantime, the afternoon when the owners arrived (it was late in October and winter was already in the air), they breathed in through the windows the purity of the lofty mountain air, although the house was not more than a hundred metres upon the river; and the Apennines were as green as beryl.

"This," said a peasant, on the road, "is the house of return. Your grandfather, too, retired to it. But he was an old man."

Wherefore Federico christened it The Return.

When, however, Eugenia arrived in the middle of February, it was so sunny that the peach-trees seemed to writhe in a desire to bloom, and it was too bad that the horse had no bells, that they might have tinkled merrily as he pulled the chaise which Mary had sent to the station. She waited for

her friend at the gate, and led her up by the hand. How Mary had changed! To say that she had aged would have been too much,—but withered, yes, however harsh the word sounded; just like a fruit conserved in a glass. Her hair was still as admirable as ever, and her eyes darted about like a swallow's; but under these dark orbs her emaciated face, though not ill, was fairly disappearing.

They spent two days of calm, not very talkative, friendship. Gioia, who was so little timid that she did not appear new to life, seized at once upon Eugenia's skirts as if she could recall four months before, and was the centre of all discussion. At table, which was illuminated by an oil lamp, the service and the pots and pans rang amidst the silence of the campestral nights with the noise of a weary, peasant meal. Very little was said of Filippo, even when Federico was around. Only on the second and last night, as he clumped from the table to the "parlour," he took her hand for a moment in his and said:

"I hope that you'll be happy. Filippo and I were very good friends, and we ought to be friends again. We had a bit of a falling out, and just imagine, on the question of intervention and neutrality. Today it's very likely that I'm a wilder interventionist than he. I believe a person must have great respect for things that are happening. That's what's called the will of God. The war has been an immense, gigantic thing, and we must regard it with reverence, with deference. Our Father Mariani would say, with the fear of the Lord. We must now turn to living as humanly as possible, and we must not forget what we have lived through."

"Filippo," he went on, "is a man out of the common run, and very hard to understand. For instance, I can't understand why he is still at sea. He is full of energy, but hasn't yet learned how to apply it. He's a powerful stream without a bed. You should be his bed."

Here he suddenly realised the inadmissible double meaning, and smiled in embarrassment.

"You must be his norm, his law, his good will. You, my dear Eugenia, are a very courageous woman, but you are a

bit passive. I wish you all the luck in the world. And now let's talk of other things."

This time he was deeply moved. Eugenia's eyes saw what deep furrows had been dug into that handsome countenance by the events of recent years, and she turned from it with a feeling of grief. Involuntarily that same glance descended to the wooden leg that stuck out of the edge of his trousers like a maroon-coloured sock and finished in a black base of wood and rubber.

The ceremony at Milan took place in the following manner: Eugenia and her father engaged rooms at a hotel, and on the next morning the groom, accompanied by his witnesses, arrived there and took them off in two closed carriages. Not having had the courage to disturb Roberto De Sonnaz, he had fallen back upon securing as witnesses Garlandi, notwithstanding the repugnance he felt for the fellow, and Lieutenant Fanelli, who had returned as round and rosy as ever to his pre-war position. His mother and sister had sent from Calinni a magnificent embroidered towel. Marco had cabled from New York: "Congratulations to both." Fanelli sent a basket of flowers. Garlandi acquitted himself handsomely with a beautiful garnet brooch. The colonel, too, had brought along a jewel in his valise, and asked his daughter:

"What? Hasn't he given you his gift yet?"

"Yes, papa, he told me that he wanted me to pick it out, so that I should be sure to be pleased."

After the court-house and the church Filippo took his wife to their lodgings. When they had been left alone in the room of imitation mahogany furnishings, he really did say that he wished to give her a present, as a souvenir of the occasion, as costly as he could afford, but he wished her to tell him what she most desired.

She hesitated, then threw her arms around his neck, and with her face hidden from him, said:

"Give me . . . a child."

"Ah," he replied laughingly, "you've asked for the most expensive gift of all."

She had released him and gone to a window. But he grew

repentant, fearing that he might have humiliated her, and he followed her to the chair into which she had sat.

"Betulla!" he whispered to her softly, stroking her tresses.

And she, who had not heard that name for almost three years, lowered her long lashes, gazing upon her dress, which was not white.

CHAPTER II

As long as his cheque book lay untouched Filippo could believe himself as rich as a Rajah. Riches, he thought, repeating unwittingly what he had been taught by his father, are a relative matter, and the truly rich man is he who spends less than he earns. He knew from years of experience with his monthly wage what money meant, and he must have foreseen the day on which the little book of cheques would be despoiled, and the perforated mother stubs would be left bereft of children. Indeed, he knew this, but refused to think of it; he felt a superstitious conviction that the great evil lay in beginning, and that this little castle of thousand-lire cards, no sooner had one fallen, would crumble into ruins entirely. Something new must turn up and bring luck with it, and he waited for that auspicious occasion, at times trusting that Eugenia's arrival would bring good fortune with it, as one waits for the spring.

The wedding expenses, save certain sundries that need not be reckoned, had been borne by his father-in-law. Filippo had to detach the first check at the end of that month, to settle the account run up during the two weeks of cold and hunger that he and his wife had suffered in their lodgings. It amounted to only two hundred lire, but it opened a gap. He was all upset, and could not see that the owner of the lodging-house, remembering that he was dealing with a capitalist, made him an extra low bow as they left.

Luckily, Eugenia, wandering all over the city from nine in the morning till seven in the evening, and communicating with every friend's friend, found a furnished apartment at once. In this way, they saved a bit. But in the meantime,—there was no getting out of it—he had to pay no less than three months' rent in advance,—nine hundred lire—so that

March began under inauspicious signs, and, unless the stroke of good fortune arrived, the cheque book was on the way to becoming a relic, just like his war passport. On the night of this disbursement, which was the last they spent at their lodgings, he came late for dinner and crossed the room to his place with a stride that seemed to possess no weight, as if he felt the floor sink under his step. His face was discoloured by a cold, broken smile; he ate without appetite, and the vein at his temple beat visibly. So much so that Eugenia, although she disliked to make love in public, placed her hand every other moment upon his, and did not reply complaisantly to the lodgers who complimented her: "The fair bride who has found her nest," and "to think, in these days, at Milan, to have found rooms so quickly," or "anybody can see that she's a lucky woman."

He followed her into their room and said, thoughtlessly:

"Do you know, that's a mighty stupid idea of your father's not to take his wife back into his home? What's he afraid of? She's an old woman!"

She opened her lips to speak, but restrained herself, and understood his meaning even before he offered an explanation.

"Oh, Pippo, but I can write at once and ask him for a little assistance. If you wish. If there's need. But, Pippo, how can you fail to see, you darling boy, that what you've spent to-day has been put aside for these coming months? What is there to be so scared about?"

"I'm not scared of anything. I need nobody. I'm sufficient to myself."

And he left, slamming the door behind him. Nor did he have the time to repent as he went down the stairs, for now he feared, not so much that he had done wrong, as that he had created the impression of a weakling.

His most serious mistake was to have a dress suit made. He had got along without one at Paris, but at Milan, lawyer Giacone's soirées were in style. And how was he not to attend them if Giacone was the very person to whom Taramanna had given him a letter of introduction, and from whom, sooner or later, he hoped would come the thread of Ariadne that

would enable him to escape from the prison of the brothers De Sonnaz? The first Thursday he invented some excuse or other; the second, he made a formal promise to attend the third; and in the meantime the suit was being fitted,—certainly a more dignified one than the other he had worn before, with hunched shoulders and the silk of the collar losing its black sheen but not yet red. He had sold that one at Rome for a few lire (at a bargain, his usual haste), when he had dismantled his room on the Via dei Serpenti. Garlandi had taken him to his new tailor, "for a suit like this is either made properly or not made at all," and had got him to believe in all good faith that accounts with the big tailors are settled at the end of the year. Instead, there was no way in which he could get the errand-boy to leave the bundle unless the money was handed over on the spot, and there was no time to be lost, as he needed it that very evening. The errand-boy even demurred when he was handed a cheque. Eight hundred and thirty lire. Now the castle of banknotes was ruined indeed. He did not even compute how much remained, through fear of seeing in black and white what he knew almost exactly by heart.

The only way in which he could get his mind off the matter was to help Eugenia with her toilette. Amidst that poverty she was a thing of luxury, completely white like a magnolia, with the exception of the neck of green crepe on the gown that she had selected from her small but perfect trousseau; no wrinkles, no jewelry, no smile. She was now at the zenith of her beauty, which was veiled by a certain nonchalance that might have seemed hauteur to one knowing her for the first time, and insipidity to another who sought the spice of coquetry. She was taller than Filippo, who, on that night, felt ennobled by her, as by some social distinction or by the possession of some rarity that he was exhibiting to connoisseurs. With his own hands he lowered the neck of her gown, saying that such was the prevailing fashion, and brought to view other pallid beauties near her arm-pits, where there yet remained some hollows uninvaded by her girlish thinness. They did not leave the house. Filippo had wished to thank

his witnesses and to gather a few acquaintances, introducing them to his "modest temporary ménage." Even Giacone, without insisting upon the rule that required Rubè to pay him the first visit, had promised to come with his wife. And the resistance of Eugenia, who found her décolleté and his dressing-suit somewhat more than was demanded for the reception of some seven or eight persons in a tiny parlour that boasted as its best furniture a console covered with red velvet supported by two griffins of carved walnut, had been of short duration. His wife all ready, Filippo was about to declare himself satisfied with the arrangements, when, sniffing around, he perceived that some of the kitchen odours were still in the air. He went over to the windows and opened them wide, letting in some fresh air, but icy cold as well.

As he followed Eugenia through the short corridor that led from the bedroom to the parlour, the image of Celestine, which had so long lain dormant, suddenly flashed across his memory. The woman with him now was beautiful, perhaps more beautiful than the Parisienne; but she did not possess that golden dust over an all-white complexion, and her narrow shoulders were gathered into a single long arch, so unlike the shoulders of that other, which were divided by a deep furrow that one might have said had been traced by desire. The perturbation of this recollection, which had enveloped him like a flame, made his embarrassment all the more poignant as he entered the parlour. How ill lighted it was! And cold! Only two guests had appeared thus far,—Garlandi and Fanelli, who had come together, both in business suits. Filippo stammered as he tried to excuse himself in reply to their excuses. But he did not raise his eyes to Eugenia, whom at this moment he would gladly have seen dressed in a black gown that closed high up on the neck. He despaired at this magnificence of silk and nudity in so petty an atmosphere, as if it were a pearl necklace that some one had entrusted to his keeping and he, usurping it for an hour, were showing it off to his guests. When Fanelli sat down upon a narrow-backed chair that was engraved with all manner of figures, with a folding seat, the chair creaked like a cracked nut, and the

heavy fellow, who had fallen into it with the clumsiness of the trench, bounced up with an exclamation:

"Da . . ."

Filippo was all ears for the door bell, waiting for some one to come in full dress so as to justify his expenditure of the eight hundred and thirty lire. Giacone, happily, arrived in a white waistcoat, with his wife, who was as long and dry as a telegraph pole. Colonel Restori, an academy companion of Colonel Berti's, arrived in evening dress, also with his wife. Massimo Ranieri, who was living on his estate in Brianza, and whom Filippo had met two days before, came in uniform, his eyes wider and more sparkling than ever, with a restless tranquillity that seemed not to pause upon the things and the persons present so that he might not judge or despise them. He, at least, knew how to sit down without shattering the chair. Roberto De Sonnaz, who arrived the very last, after Filippo had begun to chafe and had given up hope of his coming, wore a dinner coat; his reddish beard shone with brilliantine, and his bows were the acme of refinement. Filippo had not considered it necessary to invite brother Adolfo.

Filippo was, of course, too nervous to impart an agreeable tone to the conversation. At all costs he was anxious to excuse the lack of room, the ugly furniture, the insufficient light, the cold; he bewailed profusely the hard times that made things so exceedingly difficult to get; indeed, he considered himself lucky to have a roof over his head and not be suffering hunger as he had in the lodging house. But the credit for this belonged properly to Eugenia, who had run up and down the city through the mud, poor girl, and with the tram, so that she knew Milan now as well as if she had been born and grown up in it, and had even struggled with the Milanese dialect of the janitors. He expatiated for a quarter of an hour upon the details of that exploration, the dirty stairs there were to climb, and the suspicious beds.

The queerest person in the small gathering was Signora Giacone, who carried on top of her sexless body a head as weak as the crown of a poplar. Her face was emaciated and wore a distressed expression; her eyes were intent, like those

of one who is waiting for help after having shrieked the cry of alarm. She cornered Filippo by the window, and almost placing her white, bony hands upon his arm, asked in the stifled voice of a great actress:

"But why? Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why did you come to Milan? Why did you look for an apartment? Why did you seek? What are you seeking? Oh, my God, what do we all want? Yes, you're right, I'm at Milan myself, and I let my children live—live?—in this mist that smells like absinth, under this zinc-coloured sky. But tell me, tell me, haven't you a mother, a tiny hamlet, a cottage by the sea? Or amidst the mountains? It's the same thing. Why didn't you stay there? Why don't you take your beautiful wife there? You'll see how she blooms there, if she's a sensible creature, and not like the rest. Like me. All burned up."

She passed her ten open fingers across her cheeks, from her temples to her chin.

"Terrible!" she resumed, closing her eyes, shaking her head like a pendulum and fanning herself with her left hand. "The war's over and nobody's peaceful. There's only hatred. Hatred and fear. And ferocious greed. What's all this mad rush to the large cities? They trample upon each other in the dash for a place. They could kill one another. They'd spread the Spanish fever if they could. They give a thousand lire—a thousand lire!—to a janitor so that he'll tell them when a corpse is taken from an infected house. And they're ready to wrap themselves in his very shroud."

"Oh!" exclaimed Garlandi, rounding his mouth in a grimace of comic disapproval that brought an imperceptible smile to De Sonnaz's features.

But De Sonnaz had other things on his mind. He occupied the seat of honour, next to Eugenia, whom he was entertaining with some discourse or other. His air was grave, he was gazing down into the centre of her décolleté as if the thread of his thought were hidden there. When, during conclusive moments, he grew animated, he would draw near to

the woman, describing his idea with plastic gestures, and gazing suddenly into her eyes, perhaps in the hope that she would absent-mindedly let their hands meet by accident. She, however, kept her hands well secluded on the other side, and replied to his diatribe with conventional objections and complacent smiles, such as seemed to her due to a guest who, in addition, was the arbiter of her husband's destiny. Filippo watched the scene from a distance, and from the visible perturbation of the "old man," deduced happy auguries for the stability of his position with the Adsum. What harm was there in it, supposing even that he were really responsible for the mercenary notion that had come to him so suddenly? Eugenia was beyond all suspicion. No one could see that sort of shudder which rippled over upon Signora Rubè's nude skin, especially when De Sonnaz was speaking to her with his breath upon her shoulder; or it would have been attributed to the stove, which had been made too late and badly. He, Filippo, knew just what it was; he, who alone knew how all desire, beginning with his own, congealed that woman who was almost sorry to have been born a woman.

"And what do they hope? What do they expect?" continued Signora Giacone in the meantime. "More hate. More fear. A little filthy lucre. That's no longer good for anything. Why, oh, why don't we lead a different life? Why have we forgotten that the land is vast and that there's room for everybody?" She wrung her fingers as if she wished to squeeze them out. "It's maddening! Do you know the story of my aunt Adalgisa?"

"Enough, Lalla," counselled Giacone patiently. "Aunt Adalgisa was scatter-brained even before that happened."

Filippo had heard talk of Signora Lalla,—a very wealthy woman who had not been so bad looking in her early youth and had then been ruined by too frequent pregnancy and theosophical practices, although, as every one said, she was less unbearable in her own home than outside of it. Giacone, a queer looking chap, shorter than she, with a smooth face and a dimpled chin, treated her, during the short time that he was on familiar terms with her, with the discretion of a

perfect man of the world and with the interested patience expended by a lawyer upon an importunate, but wealthy client. But as to Aunt Adalgisa, Filippo had not even heard the name before and he was interested to hear the story.

"Aunt Adalgisa wasn't exactly what you'd call addle-pated, . . ." began Signora Lalla, wiping her eyes and lowering her voice to a whisper, though her throat was wide open, as one who would scream yet fears to be heard. She took him as far away from the rest of the company as the limited dimensions of the parlour permitted, and with her face close to his own, sparing not the least detail, she told him that Aunt Adalgisa was an old widow, and not so old at that, who had lived a life of beatific contentment for many years, up in her villa at Bergamo, when all of a sudden she took it into her head to move to Milan, because up there she was dying of solitude. She wouldn't accept the hospitality of her nephew, wishing to be free (as if her nephew were on the hunt for her fortune!) and she was bored at the hotel and she couldn't find a house. One day she goes on a visit of charity to a bachelor cousin, a jolly good fellow who had been condemned by the doctors and had never given a thought to any world but the present. And on his very death-bed they made out a contract. "Monstrous! Incredible!" Aunt Adalgisa cedes to her cousin her place in the Bergamo cemetery, which was the very last empty compartment in the noble vault of the Finos, and her cousin signs a paper in due form, according to which he sub-lets his apartment to Adalgisa. "As soon as he moves to another residence." Very well; the cousin dies with all the comforts of religious ministrations, and the aunt, three days later, moves into the *garçonnière* with all her outfit. And she goes mad. "She goes mad!" . . . Not stark mad, so that she needed a strait-jacket, but worse. . . . From morning to night she lies with her head in her hands, and tells herself that since she no longer has a place at the cemetery, there's no room for her in the other world. That she can't die! And that she'll have to live forever! Brrr!

She finished with eyes shot with terror and gasping for breath. Those who had heard her—and they were all, except

Eugenia and De Sonnaz—did not believe a single word, and they winked each other agreement that the tale had been invented from A to Z. Giacone, who had gone through the same torture any number of times before, word for word, went through it this time, too, behaving most graciously and only scratching the back of his neck. Nor would there have been any escape from the blind alley down which the conversation had run, if Garlandi had not boldly exclaimed:

"Why, in that case, Signora, Signorà Adalgisa ought to be as happy as the day is long."

"What!" cried Lalla, who had flattered herself that she had given her listeners a thrill of horror.

"I should say so. If she really believes that she'll never die and that for a thousand years she'll have her plate of rice and truffles, what better would she ask?"

At this juncture the wife of Colonel Restori intervened. She spoke but seldom, and then only to utter decisive things, lifting her small head, which was the colour of the white of an egg, out of her embroidered batiste collar that looked like a bib.

"It really does seem to me, Signora, that your esteemed aunt could await in greater tranquillity the outcome of things. I should not say that there was such great urgency for your esteemed aunt to assure herself a place in . . . paradise. There's room for everybody."

"She's weary," sighed Signora Lalla, half closing her eyes. "We're all weary."

One thing was certain: that it was eleven o'clock and that De Sonnaz was well inspired to guide the conversation into different channels. He took advantage of Signora Giacone's tragic sigh and of Signora Rubè's tribulations previous to "building a nest beneath the first gutterspout," and pronounced a brief but deeply felt eulogy of Milan, of Italy, and of the whole wide world of ante-bellum days, when everything was so radiant, so luminous, so cheap. He spoke in all earnestness, so that his hearers and even he himself forgot that before this horrible war he was hopping about the Exchange like a fledgling new born, all beak, and that during

this horrible war the Adsum had confined its activities as manufacturer of metal utensils exclusively to bomb-fuses. Even Filippo agreed with him, as if before the 1st of August he had been happy. It was now Fanelli's turn to vie with the others in contributing his nostalgic reminiscences, and he grew purple recalling the spit-fulls of thrush that they used to eat in his city—and at such low prices—and the Picciola beefsteaks. So that Eugenia, smiling, again passed around the rest of the cakes, and the only ones who refused were Massimo Ranieri and Filippo.

"As for me," interjected Ranieri, "I persist in the belief that it was the war which afforded the greatest pleasures."

Every face became contrite with the concealment of a secret annoyance, as was usual when, directly after the war, a genuine combatant raised his voice.

"For instance," continued Ranieri, "who can say that in the days before the war he ever experienced the voluptuous delight that came to my friend Remo Ganna?"

The atmosphere of the tiny parlour must have been fairly vitiated for Ranieri—so perfect a gentleman—to tell in the presence of ladies, with all the conventional *pardons,* but also with the suspensive dilatoriness of the stammerer, the adventure that befell Remo Ganna. The poor fellow, severely wounded in the thigh, remained during thirty-six wintry, hellish hours before the barbed-wire entrenchments of the enemy. He shivered through the cold of the night, and the two stumps of his leg, which were almost severed, struck against each other with excruciating pain. The worst of it was that he was writhing with an improrogable necessity,—one of those matters that cannot be delegated to one's orderly even if the orderly be present. Then he let himself go, and it was enough to make him swoon for sheer pleasure. "Ganna has told me the tale three times without altering a comma. And every time he ends up with, 'Believe me, Massimo, I never have felt the delight I knew on that night.' "

A half hour later Filippo angrily threw his evening clothes across the back of the chair and tried to sum up the debit and

credit sides of the evening. Debit: his cheque book, which was almost all gone,—a veritable patrimony. Credit?

Eugenia was pale and hostile.

De Sonnaz did not receive in his cramped quarters, but shortly afterward he returned the courtesy at his brother's home. But at the very last moment Eugenia refused to accompany Filippo, though he insisted and paced up and down with his hands folded behind his back, declaring that it looked bad, that nobody would believe her excuse, and so on and so forth, without uttering the real reason for his insistence: the hope that his wife's beauty would protect him and show that he, too, was rich in his own way amidst this society of wealthy persons. No, this was no mere pretext of Eugenia's. She was upset, weak, hesitant. He couldn't quite understand it, unless. . . . For the rest, to take a good look at her, she was no longer so beautiful. What shadows had descended upon her cheeks in one short week! And how wax-like shone her cheek-bones!

De Sonnaz's reception deceived nobody who had a slight understanding of these matters. With the exception of Signora Faggi, the daughter of a wealthy exchange-agent and the wife of an even wealthier shipper, scrawny and half nude to perfection, with black, sparkling eyes, black hair, and plenty of jewels, there was no one present that moved in the regular circles of the host. A celebrated pianist and two promising novelists stood out from an assembly composed chiefly of engineers and employees of the Adsum together with their wives. Evidently this was the annual soirée that some one had already mentioned to Filippo, in which Adolfo De Sonnaz opened his salon to the flower of his personnel, "in order to cultivate closer contact." The employees divided into two groups, chatted among themselves, about office affairs, hours, wages; and if anybody passed from one group to the other, it seemed that he walked across the carpet as on eggs, so as not to leave any dust from his shoes.

As Filippo entered, he was the centre of a tiny vortex formed about him by two equally intense and hostile glances coming

from contrary directions. Valsecchi, who was leaning against the jamb of the entrance like a lazy guard, shot forth from under his fleshy eyelashes a look that was as long as the visitor's walk across the diagonal of the salon. Roberto De Sonnaz, seated at the end, scarcely glanced at him, seeking tenaciously at his side, or behind him, the Eugenia who was not there. Whereupon Filippo, with his eyes fixed, resolutely strode toward the couch and the armchair on which were seated the two brothers, the hostess, Signora Faggi, a writer, an engineer's wife; and, having taken the twenty steps altogether too hurriedly and being presented to Signora De Sonnaz, he said in a voice that was too loud:

"Extremely honoured. I must excuse my wife's absence. She is ill and could not come."

"I'm so sorry," replied the hostess. "My brother-in-law tells me that she is very, very beautiful. Nothing serious, I hope."

She was neither ugly nor beautiful, and her hair was already turning white though she was still young; she was sparing with both voice and gesture. She resembled her husband and her own salon, which bore mute evidence to the compass of a life scrupulously subjected to the ideal of economic power (manufacture iron, amass gold!), alternated with labour and renunciation, and in which, more than by the tapestries, the cut glassware, and the four huge China vases upon the four pedestals in the four corners, one was impressed by the great spaces between one piece of furniture and another, the symmetrical exactness and the shining floors.

Here, too, there was talk of the hard times, of the wild Bolshevist menace against social order and the national unity, and the tangle that everything had got into, beginning with money, of which nobody any longer knew the worth, or, for that matter, whether it were worth anything at all.

"I'm always saying to my husband," said Signora Faggi, almost in a singing voice, entwining her fingers—as long and odorous as sticks of sandalwood—around her knees, "let's spend this money, for they'll take it away in any case. Today a glass of champagne is worth more than a realty deed."

Adolfo De Sonnaz was of a different opinion, and speaking very softly so as not to whistle too much between his teeth, he explained that the miracles of the nineteenth century had been accomplished by dint of saving and that only thrift could heal the twentieth century, and that money had value only when it was held back.

"Just the same," began Filippo, who could no longer stand by like an intruder, forgotten by every one in that circle of the blessed, "in what Signora Raggi says . . ."

"Faggi," she sighed, without raising her exceedingly beautiful eyebrows.

The correction flustered him.

". . . in what Signora Faggi says there's a deal of truth. What else are riches than the certainty of not being poor to-morrow, of being able to spend to-morrow?" He was thinking of his cheque book, which had made him a rich man for several weeks. "If everything can fall a prey to the final crash, to the revolution, then I understand to-day's wild desire to spend. If there is no longer security, there is no longer wealth. No one is rich. Riches as a social value are dead."

He created an impression, especially upon the writer, that poor devil in evening clothes who imagined he was so well-informed upon wealth.

"It may be," muttered Adolfo nonchalantly.

Then, thrusting his hands into his pockets and turning to the others, he added:

"At the same time, it's better to be with it than without."

And he laughed with that guttural, stomachy laugh which always came as such a surprise after his clear voice.

Filippo felt offended, not so much by the sarcastic observation as by the glance from his employer, who had avoided him, seeking only the answering glances of his equals or his loyal subordinates. His heart was filled with rancour at thought of Eugenia, for if she had been present she would have reaped the homage and the deferential envy with which every one bows to beauty. Had she been there, she would have silently defended him. He felt gripped by an irresistible

necessity of defending himself, at whatever cost, against the man who was humiliating him.

The talk veered to a Socialistic demonstration that had taken place shortly before.

"A handful of tramps," summed up one engineer. "A disgusting carnival party."

"Not a handful of tramps. I shouldn't say that," corrected Filippo, without the least notion of what he meant to say. "Did you see them, commendatore?"

He thrust his chest forward and turned toward De Sonnaz.

"I? Such sights as those?"

"Hardly a handful of tramps. Tramps, perhaps; but more than a handful. The tail of the procession was lost beyond the Foro Bonaparte, and the head reached half way up the Corso Vittorio. It was very orderly, compact, with a firm tread upon the pavement that left a disagreeable sense of their power. Upon the floats they had war consumptives, cripples, combatants from the first line troops. Clouded, contracted faces. No shouting."

For a moment he felt that some one was leaning with both hands against the back of his chair, and he did not doubt that this was Valsecchi. This certainty roused him to the highest ecstasy. He took enjoyment in the sound of his squeaky voice, and he looked only at the Chinese vase directly in front of him, imagining the exquisite tinkling that would rise from the fragments if he were to punch it off its pedestal and send it flying from the pedestal to the floor.

"No shouting. Just posters, inscriptions, pictures of Lenin and political prisoners, grotesque and pitiless caricatures. There was a religion in that stream of humanity; sinister and dark, if you will, but religion none the less. It was detestable, if you'll have it so, but imposing; something that seemed to have sprung up from the pavement like lava and that still looked at the light with hostility. As that procession flowed by, one thought of a stream as yet without banks, that may become wild and pull up the largest trunks, but that in the end will fertilise the earth."

There was an instant's silence that seemed endless. Sig-

nora De Sonnaz broke it. She was seated directly facing Filippo, but her icy voice seemed to come from infinite distance. She uttered only three precipitous words, without accent and without moving a muscle of her face:

"Beautiful, most beautiful."

And with incisive irony she made a gesture of applause.

"Tunta would have been happy to hear you, lawyer Rubè," came the careful voice of him who was behind the armchair; it was not Valsecchi, but a young office mate, with aquiline nose and moustache whose tips rose to his eyes.

Tunta was the name of the much-feared foreman at the Bovisa factory.

"Tunta," resumed Filippo, acting as one who is trying not to drown, "is an extraordinary man."

"Hush!" whispered Roberto De Sonnaz into his ear, passing close by and tapping him on the shoulder.

"It's easily understood that he's been misled by absurd doctrines, but he's an extraordinary man just the same. He exacts obedience from hundreds of men, without recourse to any authority other than that which comes to him as a superior personality. He has made a thorough study of Marx, Bakunin, and Tolstoi. Unlike so many other Socialists, he is not intolerant toward Mazzini. I had a long talk with him on the subject, only a little while ago. Naturally I said he was wrong. For he *is* wrong. But he is somebody. He is square-shouldered, clear-eyed, with a warm voice. In another society he would be a condottiere."

Only Signora Faggi, consumed with curiosity, was left listening to him.

When he had returned to his room and was undressing, the artery at his temple was dilated, the skin on his face seemed old and withered, his soft eyes were swimming. Eugenia, who pretended that she had not been waked by his entrance, saw him in this condition.

"All burned out!" she murmured to herself. "Destroyed! The war has made an end of him. Beyond hope! Lord. . . ."

"Lord," she repeated, praying that on the following day these words should seem to have been uttered in a dream.

The news of the reception at the De Sonnaz home spread quickly and noisily among the employees and assumed legendary proportions. Many of them surrounded Filippo and earnestly begged him "not to desert" the toilers' meeting, which had already been called for the purpose of asking an increase in wages, "which were scandalously inadequate to the cost of living." They asked him how much he received and were dumbfounded at the figure. "A mere pittance! A man of your intelligence! Who would ever have thought it? In these times! For a position of trust!" They insisted, they flattered. For the rest, everybody was joining the cause, except Valsecchi, of course, and the regular two or three loyal employees. Even some of those who had been at the De Sonnaz reception had promised to attend. He had been at the reception, too? Indeed? Then he could see that there was no harm in it.

He decided upon a firm attitude: to hold his tongue at the meeting, to lose himself in the multitude. But when the discussion was at its height a voice cried out:

"Let lawyer Rubè have the floor."

Whereupon others echoed:

"Rubè. Rubè."

He arose; his face was ashen-white; he spoke only a few words:

"I have nothing to add to what has been said by the speakers before me. I approve their stand. I will move the order of the day. I will only recommend objectivity, so that between industry and intellectual labour no conflict shall arise which might prove harmful to the one and the other."

Scant applause and an ambiguous murmuring followed these words.

The following days brought nothing new except the glad tidings that all wages, without any distinction whatsoever, would be raised twenty per cent on the first of April. Not a bad April fool joke. To Filippo this meant one hundred and forty lire more, and they were welcome, indeed. Truly he had feared a catastrophe after that reception, and his employer had not summoned him since then. But he knew that

Adolfo had left for Intra, where he had a factory and a villa, and he looked upon this fear as another one of his "regular fits of cowardice." It mattered nothing at all to him if, upon the morning of the 29th of March, Valsecchi, passing him in the yard, appeared so engrossed in thought as not even to greet him.

Upon his desk lay a typewritten letter: "This company, in view of the fact that your probational period ends with the 31st of the current month, hereby notifies you that your duties have terminated. With our kindest regards." A stamp and Valsecchi's signature, in pencil, finished the short page. At that moment, for the interval of a flash, he imagined that the letter meant nothing more than that his period of probation was over, and was an invitation for him to enter upon "a steady job." Then he ran to Roberto De Sonnaz. He had not yet arrived. Filippo waited for him at the head of the stairs. The brother understood nothing; he had merely a hazy suspicion. He would look into it and find out. Though, to tell the truth, nothing and nobody counted at the Adsum outside of the chief's will. He would tell Filippo to-morrow. In the meantime, let him be calm. He called him captain, in memory of the good times at Paris. Was Signora Eugenia completely recovered? Let Rubè remember him to her.

Twenty-four hours later he gave him a diffuse, friendly explanation. No personal reasons. On the contrary! The metallurgic industry was headed for a tragic crisis, and the most ruthless retrenchment was necessary. The personnel was being reduced, and they were beginning by discharging the employees who had been with them for the shortest time. In proof of the fact that there had been no personal reasons, his brother Adolfo had given him a month's pay extra, which was not coming to him by right. He would have liked to shake Filippo's hand and thank him for the services he had rendered, but he was at Milan only for two days and laden with business worries: not a minute in which to catch his breath.

Roberto's own opinion was that Filippo Rubè was too brainy a man to stick with that firm, and that so humble a position

was a hindrance to his ultimate indubitable success. They would remain friends, wouldn't they?

Filippo could never have imagined that he would cross the threshold of that office for the last time so nimbly, and with such a feeling of release. Was he leaving a prison? What good news did the white clouds bear him? But he said nothing to Eugenia, and, taking advantage of her absence, he went over his cheque book, which had been left blank the evening on which he paid for his evening clothes, figuring up his account to the last centesimo. There were still left, including interest, two hundred and sixty-six lire and ten centesimi. Not much.

Or too much? Added to the fourteen hundred-lire notes that he had collected at the Adsum cashier's window, it amounted to a tidy sum.

For no discoverable reason he felt a strong wind blowing within him,—burning internal gaiety that almost impelled him to tear those notes to shreds—with no trace of anger—and light a cigarette with the last. He knew that wind well. It was courage—long and tremblingly invoked—the gust that urges the warrior irrevocably forward and hurls him like a projectile against the enemy's cannon.

CHAPTER III

This access burned out more rapidly than a bonfire of straw, and Filippo, having given Eugenia eight hundred-lire notes to pay their current accounts and all other expenses till the end of the month, held the other seven tightly hidden in his inside pocket.

For three days he said nothing to his wife, leaving punctually at half-past eight and at half-past two, as if on his regular trips to the office. On the fourth day he could stand it no longer, and he lay abed two hours beyond leaving time, with the glassy April light pricking his closed eyelids.

Eugenia bent over him, ran her fingers through his hair and asked:

"Don't you feel well? Filippo! It's late."

"No," he replied. "I don't feel well. Let me sleep."

Then he silently dressed and loitered for an hour in the central thoroughfares. On the Via Orefici were the flower dealers. He bought some flowers cheap,—red wall flowers. They had a strong scent,—an uncertain odour, half flower, half vegetable.

"Do you know what?" he said to his wife when he had returned for lunch, looking her straight in the eyes. "I've sent the De Sonnaz brothers and all their metal utensils to the devil."

She looked at him questioningly.

"Yes. It was time. That was nothing but a prison. An ice-house. I need air."

And he got up so suddenly that it seemed as if he must at once throw all the doors and windows wide open. Instead, he went to the adjoining room and returned with the flowers that he had left in a vase.

"Here. The first flowers of spring. I've brought them to you as a sign of good luck. Everything will go well with us with the coming of the new season."

He brought them close to her face. She recoiled.

"What? Don't you like them?"

"Yes, dear. I like them."

But, as she forced herself to smell them, just to please him, she turned white and was seized with an attack of vomiting.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" he asked, following her into the kitchen, where, holding her sides, she barely reached the sink in time.

"Oh! Forgive me, darling," she said, when she was able to turn around. "It's not my fault. I hope that . . . I believe that . . . !"

"What is it? What?"

"Why, Pippo, I told you back in the first week of March, when I had the first suspicion. Lord! You don't understand anything. I think I'm going to be a mother."

"Come, come! Nausea after a month and a half at the most! Impossible! It must have been the Holy Spirit."

Her eyes had turned servile, which was rare with her, and she was waiting for a smile. At his words she was suddenly transformed. The hollows of her cheeks spotted with red, her pupils rigid and blind with anger, her fists balled, she rushed at him, but did not touch him.

"What do you mean? What are you saying? You scoundrel!"

He tried to explain himself, to placate her, to grasp her by the wrist. She freed herself.

"Leave me! Assassin! Leave me!"

And she fell back upon the couch, groaning with a voice that seemed to come from a distance, from one buried alive, and trembling all over until she broke into loud, disconsolate weeping, after which she swooned. Now she was beautiful anew, as if transfigured after the agony, and he fell upon his knees before her, kissing her limp hands, wavering between his amazement at that immaculate beauty and the hope that she would have a miscarriage, or that the suspicions of pregnancy should turn out to be unjustified,—and the terror of having killed her and the need of being freed, through some event or even by some misfortune, from this insupportable

burden, and the deference to maternity, and the desire of good, and the horror of the mesh of distorted feelings amidst whose coils he was fairly strangling, calling upon either desperate death or madness.

At last he set about reviving her. He sent the domestic to the tobacconist's for a glass of cognac, sprinkled cold water over Eugenia's forehead, and saw her eyes open again, pale, as if rising again to the surface from the depths into which they had sunk. She seemed to hear as from the other side of a river, with her half open lips, rather than with her ears, the words he uttered in his defence. How could she have believed such a thing? What had she thought? Was there any reason for lending such a scoundrelly sense to a few innocent words? Even if they had been impulsive? Really (he asseverated, God knows why), it was not the usual thing for the disturbances of pregnancy to appear so soon. His surprise was justifiable. And how could Eugenia have overlooked the extenuating circumstances? The confusion in which he, poor fellow, now found himself, suddenly deprived of the security of a regular income, and the added, overwhelming responsibility that had been announced to him at such a bad moment? Yes, he had always been unfortunate, more through the fault of circumstances than through any inherent fault of his own, and he worked nothing but harm all about him, against his will. But now he felt that this new trial would find him ready to face it bravely, and that Eugenia's love was at his side. Their child would bring his own bread with him, lending courage to his father; good times, bad times,—nothing lasted forever, and the Lord would send help. Then he wept; genuine tears, though his sobs were too loud, for he wished to slake his thirst with the sound of his weeping; and Eugenia passed her fingers through his hair, and kissed him with her cold lips upon his eyes.

Yet what guardian angel could keep him from debating with himself when, an hour later, he went out for the air with his wife by his side? She was still worn from the nervous attack, and already her face was lined as if the day of childbirth were near and all her strength were gathered in her womb. He

walked along with his eyes directed downward, his chin on his cravat, examining the words that had aroused her hysterical fury: "Nausea after a month and a half! Impossible! It must have been the Holy Spirit." He repeated them ten and twenty times, recreating even their imponderable intonation and reconstructing the line of the insignificant glance with which he had accompanied them. And still he could not understand how Eugenia could suddenly have imparted so precise and ferocious a sense to them. Excess of defence? Or an evil conscience that outcried suspicion with sobs and lamentations, and with the writhings of persecuted innocence? One look at that woman's face was enough to convince any one that no sensual life dwelt in her bosom, and that her surrender was a tribute of service to the man she loved. If such a thing could be called love. How many times had he observed that before him she undressed "like a nun before a doctor." And she, forcing a laugh, had answered: "But, Pippo, would you have me undress to the tune of castanets?" And she would place her weak hands around his neck, without clasping him, without ever embracing him. No, Eugenia did not love him, and perhaps had never loved any man except Federico, and she could not be the mistress of anybody; she could be only a nun, a nurse, good for closing one's eyes in the last agony. It was true that he did not love her, either; and, looking into the matter more closely, he had not loved Celestine or Mary. Perhaps not even the student girl, Ersilia. And whom could he love if he detested himself? In the villa, on the road to Mareno, that night he had possessed Eugenia; but he had done so only to feel his heart, which was filled with terror, beat with a different rhythm. She had yielded to him rather than shout, rather than use force, and as a reward to a warrior, ha, ha, who had not died of fear. Very well, was it so unlikely that some other person, warrior or not, had committed another half-violence against this frailty? And then, who could assure him that she was naturally frigid, without any twin soul or elective affinity? If she had lied to her father, she could lie even better to her husband. Garlandi, who ought to know a thing or two about women, had

told him that there is no such thing as an incorruptible woman, and that it's all a matter of who the man is and how he goes about it. And suppose little Rubè were the child of another, and of some other to whom Eugenia had really belonged,—every last fibre of her?

With a blazing face he lingered behind a step to light a cigarette, and raising his eyes to that smooth Madonna-like forehead, he grew ashamed. He took her by the arm and mentally begged her forgiveness. Yes, he knew that his reasoning was as tortuous and as false as the dry logic of a public attorney who builds up his accusation without so much as a look at the defendant's face. Moreover, even from the point of view of mathematical probabilities, was it not absurd to imagine that Marco Berti would have come to Paris, knowing of his sister's second sin, to solicit a marriage intended to prevent a scandal? He would have been more imperious, more threatening. And the child would be born before the seventh month. And now again he began to spin his ratiocinations, fatally, as a spider spins his fibre. He was like a head that has just been lopped off upon the guillotine, but whose brain, through some miraculous intervention, continues to think, though severed from life and without a heart. Without a heart and without a guardian angel. His mother had often told him, when he had been a bad boy: "You must pray to your guardian angel always to help you, Filì. For sometimes your guardian angel deserts you." Sometimes! Now he raised his eyes again to his wife. How alien, how remote, how inaccessible, how indistinct she seemed to him, encased in that panoply of fair skin!

Eugenia's opinion was that it would be better to return to Rome and live together with her father; this was the only decisive way of reducing expenses. She said to him:

"What are you doing at Milan? You won't hunt out another humble position. That's not the kind of thing for you. At Rome you have friends, acquaintances, former clients. There's Taramanna,—a queer bird, to be sure, but he's always been fond of you. Take my advice; let's go. This

is a hard city for any one who still has his way to make. It's a city for people who have arrived."

He hesitated; but the idea of returning like a lost traveller to the city where he was known was unbearable.

"Rubè," he said, "does not turn back. Neither in war nor in peace."

Yet, within, he knew that in a month and a half, when the time came to advance the next three months' rent, he would think over the advice and change his mind.

"If you really think it best," he added, quite coldly, "you may return yourself."

She measured him with an oblique glance, from under her lashes, which he had never seen in her before. Eugenia had not yet replied to the colonel, who kept complaining of his wretched solitude and entreated her, almost in all seriousness, to find him some clerking or accounting position. Now she wrote to him: "Why don't you take back mamma? She'll keep you company, and the good air of the Tufo will restore her calm." In exchange, by return mail, she received a letter saturated with tears and adorned with effusive blessings. Yes, the advice of his adored daughter was holy and came from the innermost depths of her heart. The next month, May, he would free the woman from her prison. "And may God help us all and reward you for your kind action."

"Did I tell you?" she said to Filippo, "that papa is taking mamma out of the sanatorium?"

"Yes?"

"So that in a couple of months, at the most, I think we can have . . . my share."

"Hold your horses. . . . What's more, I didn't marry you for your dowry."

This time she did not look at him with her angry glance; her face was drawn with shame and she left slowly, without a sound.

Mornings and afternoons, though at irregular hours, he would go to Giacone's office. There were three assistants there, and Rubè made the fourth.

"You've done well. You've done wisely," said Giacone to him, congratulating him upon having left his position. "The free profession is the only one for you. It's the most dignified. The most promising."

For a little while he would be expected to work without pay, as the third assistant was still doing. But it was understood that he was free to hunt up a clientèle of his own if there were any to be got. And he'd surely find it, what the devil!

"My dear friend, at Milan it's all a matter of persistence and patience. Take me; for three years I was like a hunting dog chasing flies. Water in the tobacco-pipe; *acqu' 'a pippa,* as they say in Naples, eh, my boy?"

He laughed a stridulent laugh, then strode rapidly between the desk and the heater, so that the folds of his gown fluttered in the air. He tapped his forehead as if he were still troubled at thought of the lean years.

"Very well," he resumed, coming to a dramatic stop and posing in profile, as small as he was, with his left hand resting majestically upon the desk-top, "one fine morning along comes Fortune. Without warning. Like a gust of wind. Fhh!"

Two Thursdays in succession, Filippo and Eugenia went to Giacone's home. Signora Lalla patronised Filippo particularly, honouring him with social and religious confidences. On the other nights, however, he would go out alone, and almost regularly he would wind up at the café or the café-chantant with Garlandi. Once he even let himself be dragged to a gambling-house and invested one hundred and fifty lire, although, "with disgusting cowardice," as Garlandi put it, he played a small game, whereas, according to Garlandi, "in war and at the gaming table to fear is to fail."

"When are you going to find those ten thousand lire," Garlandi would ask. "With ten measly thousand lire I'll take you in as a partner. Serious business, Signor Don Filippo. What do you expect? To have them fall into your pocket,—these bank notes?"

"Bravo!" Filippo answered. "Suppose you lend them to me."

And they concluded with a laugh.

He really had a certain business proposition in mind. The future belonged to the good soil of Italy, to agricultural labour, not to the metallurgical industry with its foreign iron that had to be paid for with its weight in gold. At Calinni there were marmalade fruits, odorous honey (that put to shame the sticky, canary-yellow juice which was called Alpine honey), tomatoes with a pulp that was as firm and clean-cut in its very abundance as the flesh of chubby infants. They could organise a partnership for the preparation of boxed preserves; he could be the founder of the company and the representative for the northern markets. As early as the beginning of April he had written to his mother in detail about the proposition; she had long forgotten what full letters from her son were like, and heard only superficial news about him, always through Eugenia.

"My dear son," replied Donna Guilia, "here everybody looks and watches out for himself and God watches out for us all. How do you expect any partnership to be formed if there isn't one of them who would hesitate about plucking out his neighbour's eye? The agents come from Campagnammare, they buy, they pay cash, they load their carts and make their good profit. Even Lucietta's husband,—for I had him read your letter,—says that there's nothing to be expected of such a scheme, and that an old place isn't going to change its habits so soon. Then the folks here say that you're too far away, that you're lost to our district, and that now you've left Rome you can't take care of the voters. The envious even say Lord knows what sort of princess your wife must be, if her husband doesn't deign to bring her to his birthplace. You know the saying: Out of sight, out of mind. Baron Ferraro, who is as ignorant as a cabbage-stalk, claims he's sure of the election, and his stewards are running around like errand-boys. That rascal of an Enrico Stao is bustling about in grand style, vowing that the Revolution is only a matter of a few weeks, and promising the land to the peasants as if he were more powerful than the king himself. But when will these elections take place? The apothecary says that the district

has been four years without a deputy, ever since the death of Don Andrea, who did neither good nor harm, just like theriacal waters, and that as far as he's concerned, now that Don Filippo Rubè has withdrawn from the contest, he won't take the trouble to vote, for a deputy to represent a hole like Calinni is like a plaster upon a paralytic. Enough. We've even had a demonstration before the very town hall, with Vivas for Russia, which had never before been named in these parts."

Filippo felt himself whirling down toward a soft, stifling maelstrom that would consume him anew. For an appreciable period his lung had been giving him no bother, but from time to time he would be surprised by a sudden rush of blood to his heart that gave him the sensation of stifling, and attacks of vertigo that filled his ears with a buzzing as of a swarm of bees; he would lose his sense of distance and make ridiculous errors in gauging the height of a flight of stairs. A couple of times he was seized on the street by a tickling, vomiting sensation that he was barely able to conquer.

"We're at it again," he said to himself, recalling the torment through which he had gone four years before. "Or maybe I, too, am pregnant. . . ."

On the afternoon of the fifteenth April, however, he felt really well. On his way to Giacone's office, which was on the Via Vittor Hugo, he had hardly crossed the Piazza del Duomo when, out of the Via Dante he saw a mob come pouring, led by some who were armed with bludgeons as large as Titan's clubs. The spectacle amused him; he took shelter in a doorway that afforded a good view, and prepared to enjoy the scene. There was a mad scamper, and at the same time he heard snatches of speeches, songs, and a fusillade that seemed as gleeful as applause. Taking careful note of himself he realised that his pulse was beating rapidly and that his nostrils were quivering like those of a horse as he sniffs the cool morning on a river bank.

"The old war odours," he said, laughing internally. "A little more and I'll really be neighing like a war horse."

Then he visited the square where the encounter between the Bolsheviki and the Fascisti had taken place, as well as the side streets. Remnants of the scattered crowd still remained; but one had the impression that the throngs had surged to another part of the city. In vain he tried to scent the direction, and he wandered aimlessly through the central thoroughfares, turning back every ten minutes to the Piazza del Duomo. The water, with which the firemen had tried to dampen the ardour of the two factions, had gathered into pools where the fairy April sky coquettishly sought its reflection. Umbrellas opened and closed at the passing of showers so quick that they sounded as merry as those in the comic operas. There was also a buzzing hail whose final discharge crossed the sky of the Piazza, melting into a perfidious sunbeam; and there was, at last, the rainbow, thrown like a bridge of silk from the spires of the Cathedral to the roofs of the Royal Palace.

The strange, changeable atmosphere, bearing waves of ozone and gun-powder, reeked with the odour of blood, and Filippo felt himself writhing in a desire for violence, as acute as thirst. This was the real sort of battle, such as never had been glimpsed in the life of the trenches, where danger and death came in bureaucratic series, and the enemy, ever invisible, was the Enemy with a capital E,—an abstraction capable of inspiring blind terror, but never the glee of that hatred which sees its object and assails it. Here, on the other hand, there were banners, songs, a brief, wild dash before a public composed of partisan spectators, shouts, calling by name, hand to hand combat, and before nightfall, victory, with the conquered and the conquerors returning home for dinner, and three or four dead upon the sun-heated pavement. The leaders of the two opposing parties certainly knew each other by name and had a nodding acquaintance, even as did the heroes of Homer and Ariosto. The very cry of *Alalà*, so similar to the *allalì* of hunting, struck a pleasant response within him. He, too, would like to join the shooting; to clasp a good Browning gun, as flat as a hand and as blackish-blue as a raven's wing, and feel it vibrate in his grasp.

All at once a crowd, part of the men in grey-green, ran

across the Piazza into the Via Carlo Alberto, uttering incomprehensible cries.

"It's over. Come on. He's cornered."

Filippo, too, started on the run to reach them and learn what had happened. He recognised Massimo Ranieri; but Ranieri was not shouting; under his helmet was his firm, archangelic countenance, and his eyes were large, shining with the certainty of having performed his duty, just as when he had told Filippo, without any vainglory whatsoever, that he had managed to "pull wires" so as to be sent to the Piave, despite his unfit condition.

"What is it?" Filippo whispered, grabbing his sleeve. "What have you done?"

"We've smoked the serpent's lair. The *Avanti* offices are on fire! He's cornered."

"Too bad!"

"Too bad?"

"Yes. I'd like to have been there."

"Really?"

"Yes. A fellow likes to stir his fists once in a while. . . . Take it out on some one."

Ranieri spoke as he ran on, without fatigue. Rubè, trying to keep up with him, breathed heavily. As they approached the Piazza Missori, a deafening roar of triumph arose from the multitude toward the flags that appeared at the windows

"Ha! Look who's there!" cried Filippo, attracted by a familiar voice. He had caught sight of Garlandi with an Ardito coat on, a black shirt, red in the face and with the arteries at his neck swollen from the voluminous shouts he was hurling into the air.

His amazement separated him from Ranieri and rooted him to the sidewalk, where he remained like the branch of a tree cast upon the banks by a rushing torrent, while the waters continue to roll down the mountainside.

He did not know that Garlandi was an Ardito and a Fascista. That night Garlandi explained the matter in his own way.

"You don't want to go into business. You don't want to go into politics. Yes, I know, you're waiting for them to

elect you at Scalini. You're waiting for the fig-eaters to fly into your plate all nice and roasted, with napkins around their beaks. I ask you, boy, what in Christ's name do you want to do? Learn to play the Jew's harp?"

He induced Rubè to attend a meeting of his group, two days later. It was a matter of defending Italy, order, victory, the legitimate interests of the veterans. Garlandi vouched for the new member. It was he who introduced his friend as a genuine combatant, one of the first of the interventionists, "one who had not shed his blood that it might become stinking pus." And what an orator! Deputy for Scalini in the near future. Calinni, corrected Filippo; but Garlandi pretended not to have understood, holding his forefinger rigid over the breast of the newcomer to show where the bullet had entered and what direction it had taken.

Among those present were veterans of the Tuesday skirmish, and they were as exalted as if they had reconsecrated the Earth. There were men of every description. The discussion was disorderly. History, explained the president, had reached a turning-point. The Paris Conference would lead to nothing. Orlando and Sonnino would obtain just as much. "We are perhaps upon the eve of the march to Lubiana and of dictatorship; liquidation of the enemy without and of the traitors within; a word from D'Annunzio will give the signal." Garlandi delivered a short talk upon the question of Smyrna. It really seemed as if he were a specialist upon Smyrna. Ranieri had nothing to say; he stood there, impassive, looking rarely at Rubè, with a glance that to him, recalling the Dolomites, seemed diffident. Rubè could not make out how there could be room in the same assembly "for that assassin Garlandi" and for such born armed cherubs as Ranieri. "Bah!" he said to himself, by way of explanation, "they've both killed. They're both drunk with blood." But he could not conceal from himself the fact that out of the discussion rose a flame of unbridled youth which burned away all the dross.

These violent scenes toned him up again; the disturbances of the early weeks of April were not repeated. He felt

anew the presentiment, which so many other times had played him false, that the vast, miasmatic swamp of his life was near its mouth and that within a short while the stream of his destiny would be debouching into a deep and healthful river. Very soon something beautiful and significant would surely happen; very soon life would surely be worth the living. Yet he attended no more meetings in the days that followed. He did not wish to neglect Giacone. The notion of once more becoming a captain, this time in a new war, was not one to cast lightly aside, but it displeased him to pursue precisely that line of politics which would most redound to the profit of the De Sonnaz brothers and other similar manufacturers of metal products. And it certainly did seem queer to be a political bedfellow of "that assassin Garlandi."

Assassin apart, he knew that Garlandi was "a figure." Perhaps the persons were right who were spreading the report that his transfer from the artillery to the infantry had not been a heroic sacrifice, and that behind that transfer was a story of forged documents meant to get him into a less burdensome arm of the service; that, moreover, when the deception had been discovered they had hurried him to the trenches, and that the matter would have had an even worse end if some mysterious hand had not drawn a curtain across the whole business. That tale about the Caporetto prison, too, and his easy life at Katzenau up to the day of the patriotic escape, was none too clear. And now, God knows from what wardrobe came the black shirt of the Ardito. But in the café-chantant, at the Tabarin balls, at the nocturnal retreats, Garlandi took possession of Filippo. His reserves of hilarity and of strength knew no limit, and his experienced ease amid equivocal social groups had a precise refinement, half of the artist, half of the scientist. There was no ill humour that could resist his lusty laughter. He treated life with a masterly self-confidence, fashioning it after his own whims, without effort, even as the potter shaping his clay, barely looking at it and whistling as he works. Here, indeed, was a man "who was capable of living." Not like Federico, who had sacrificed a leg to the game and had then retired into seclusion!

Easter came, and Filippo bought ten white roses for his wife.

"My dear," she said to him, kissing him in thanks upon the cheek. And she shuddered as if she had something difficult to say to him.

"What is it?"

"Listen, Pippo, and please don't take it amiss. Why are you so often with Garlandi? I don't like Garlandi."

"You don't, eh? You prefer Roberto De Sonnaz? The De Sonnaz brothers?"

She fled, even before hearing his correction, with her palms clapped against her ears; she locked herself in her room to keep him, in his fright lest she suffer another attack of convulsions, from following her with his apologies and his aid.

This, too, blew over; and the week brought nothing else new. He went out every night, except on Easter evening, and two nights out of three he would meet Garlandi. He would come home at one in the morning, some times at two, would sleep late, and would appear at Giacone's, if he went at all, shortly before noon. When, at night, he entered his room on tip-toe, Eugenia would turn over in bed just to let him know that she had heard; but she said not a word to him.

It was within four days of the end of the month when Eugenia, approaching him timorously, said to him:

"I'm sorry, Pippo. Everything's going up. I'm left without a sou."

"What? What's that?" he shouted.

She planted herself before him, and fixing her eyes upon his, resolved this time to have it out at all costs.

"Yes," she repeated. "I am left with-out a sol-it-a-ry sou."

There were still two hundred lire in his pocket, but he did not touch them. He took out his cheque-book and signed the last check, for all the remaining sum. He thought of asking Giacone to let him have a little money, but that afternoon he learned that Giacone had left for Turin, where he had a case to try, and that he would be gone for a week. Very well. He had enough to carry him through the coming week.

That night, although he had made no previous appointment, he went out for a stroll toward the Portici Settentrionali, where he usually arranged to meet Garlandi. Several street-walkers were loitering amidst the dense throng; they looked at him invitingly out of their dark pupils. "They want me," he thought. "But I'm one of them! . . . Who knows whom I'm waiting for," he went on, "to put fifty lire into my palm."

A half hour later Garlandi turned up.

"Why, look!" he exclaimed. "God makes men and then pairs them off."

"Where are you bound this evening?" asked Filippo. "Are you going to play?"

"Not I. How about you?"

"I'll go wherever you take me."

They went to the gambling house. But this time Filippo did not play "with disgusting cowardice." He walked in with eyes straight ahead of him, scarcely listening to the cocottes who called Garlandi by the affectionate nickname of Memè, and proceeded directly to the table, making way with his elbows through the protesting players. He was fanatically certain that luck was with him, and surely enough it attended him from the very first play. He was almost infallible in his follow-up, in holding off when the wind seemed to veer, in resuming at the right moment, after draining a glass of cognac. During that whole night he saw nothing but the dancing of the ball in the grooves, and the black goatee of the *croupier* who kept scratching away at it, pursing his lips like a mushroom whenever he had a moment's rest. As soon as Garlandi saw which way the wind was blowing, he began to follow Rubè's lead. Filippo was already beyond his fifteenth thousand, and his companion was nearing his tenth. Rubè, however, continued to play, and lost a wager.

"Oi," whispered Garlandi into his ear. He did not hear.

"Oi," repeated Garlandi, this time more loudly, and taking him by the arm, dragged him out by sheer force.

It was still dark, but the cool of dawn was in the air. A clock at the corner struck the hour,—four. For a short

while they walked along in silence, apart, and the pavement echoed under their footsteps.

"I say, Don Filippo," said Garlandi at last, "this time I'll take you into my business as partner. You've got the measly ten thousand lire, now."

"I'd be crazy to do it. I haven't the slightest intention."

He did not raise his eyes from the ground. The money occupied him less now than did his return home. Up to now he had not spent a whole night out. What could he tell Eugenia? She wasn't the woman to enjoy his "good luck."

"Ohè!" resumed Garlandi after another silence. "To-morrow is Sunday. To-day, I should say. What's your programme?"

"H'm?"

"Let's go away. Somewhere on a spree. Listen. I've an idea. Let's go to Paris for a week. What's there doing at Milan? Even if you'd want to drown yourself it's ten to one you'd find no water in the river. Simplon-Paris line.—Electric trains leave at 7:25 A.M."

"That's a bright idea! . . ." answered Filippo. "And our bags?"

"Bags be damned! We can buy whatever clothes we need. Haven't you got a wallet as thick as a bag? I'll lend you the underwear."

Filippo was in no mood for discussion. They parted at a quarter past four.

"You go and say good-bye to your wife. Tell her some tale,—an urgent business matter. I'll just have time to go home, take a warm bath, and pack the bag for both of us. And at seven o'clock sharp we meet at the station, tickets in hand."

As Filippo went up stairs he felt persuaded beyond a doubt that he would do nothing of the sort. But as he inserted his key into the lock he trembled at thought of waking Eugenia. This time she would not be satisfied with merely turning over in bed. She would get up with eyes distended, with hair dishevelled; and there would follow a scene with the inevitable convulsions.

Wherefore he took off his shoes before entering, and walking almost on his toes he went to the parlour. He turned on the light and the creaking of the switch sounded to him as loud as a shot. He had gulped down a goodly number of glassfuls, and the flames of the alcohol had suddenly set fire to his brain, raging like those that have been smouldering for a long time beneath a briar heap. From his wallet he extracted five thousand-lire notes and placed them in an envelope. Then slowly he wrote a letter, supporting his right wrist with his left so as to make the handwriting a bit more firm. "It seems that luck at last has come our way. I am going to Paris on an important deal. In the meantime here's a sum to provide plentifully for your needs. I'll be away a week. This amount is part of my advance payment in the deal. If you don't want to stay on at Milan, go to Rome. I'll rejoin you soon."

"Good," he said, as he closed the envelope over the banknotes. "In all probability I'll not go. But in the meantime I have an appointment with that assassin at the station. I'll tell him that I'm going back home. I have time in which to change my mind."

But as he walked through the corridor he detected a kitchen odour and it seemed that he could scent, too, the pale odour of childbirth. And his desire for flight rose high.

Eugenia had heard him when he came in, and now, as he shut the door behind him, she heard him again, with horror. She tried to rise, to call him, to follow him down the stairs. But she fell back breathless upon the bed.

In the meantime he had put on his shoes again and was already on his way.

"The serious part of all this," he said to himself, in the white light of dawn, "is not that I'm without a bag. It's that I have no passport. Bah! Another reason, and a decisive one, for not going to Paris. But that rogue of a Garlandi is just the fellow to have friends at every frontier."

Garlandi, however, had really warmed the water and had a nice long bath. Then he used up a whole phial of perfume, rubbing himself all over with it, and having looked at the

clock and seen that it was time to be going, went to bed the better to enjoy his sensation of dryness.

"Crazy drunk!" he exclaimed aloud. "To go to Paris! And via Switzerland, at that! And I haven't even my passport ready!"

And he fell asleep laughing, like a little boy.

CHAPTER IV

As it was not yet even five, Filippo took the longest way to the station. He found pleasure in watching the pale sky assume the hues of daybreak. The dawn was bare of clouds. At times, in the most deserted cross-ways, the swallows would rise in flight quite close to his face, almost fearlessly, and he smiled at the encounter. Milan had never seemed beautiful to him. But this morning it was. Surely no other city in Italy so closely resembled Paris. The trees stood motionless in the yards, and the house-fronts smiled at the light without opening their eyes. The April Sunday slept late into the morning, and almost all the windows were still closed. And when one of them, on a top floor, opened with a loud clatter of the shutters against the wall, this beginning of the daily life seemed to possess the solemnity of some inaugural function, and Filippo felt like sending up, in a half voice, his good-day wishes to the tenant. He walked along with no thoughts to trouble him, filled with a sweet somnolence that shook off all worldly cares.

When he reached the entrance to the station it was still three quarters of an hour before the train's leaving time. He stood at the foot of the stairs, smoking and watching the passers-by; then he turned to the sketches and the scribbling on the wall. One of the inscriptions, written in uncial letters, with a piece of coal, attracted him. He had seen it at other times upon street-corners, but had not had the time to read it. It said: "You stupid astronomers, the earth does not turn." "Indeed," he observed, "nobody's ever seen it turn around like a roulette wheel." The sudden and unexpected recollection of the gambing house inflamed his pupils. "If the earth isn't turning," he added, "then I am. . . . All of which proves," he concluded, "that I'm rather pleasantly drunk.

. . . With alcohol and sleep." He smiled contentedly, and felt his wallet.

Surely at any moment Garlandi would be coming along,—Memè, with his leather bag. Or rather, without a bag, and with the impassive countenance of the jester who conceals his laughter in his paunch, ready to hurl it forth at the right moment. They would look into each other's face a moment, then they would both snicker at thought of the journey to Paris by way of Lausanne, without passports. And off they'd go, each to his house. The chief point was for Eugenia not to see the letter; and this, after seven, would be momentarily less and less likely. Had it not been for that crazy notion of leaving the letter, and those five thousand-lire notes, everything would have been easy: he could have excused himself, on the pretext of some business or political appointment, for the night spent away from home; or even make no attempt to excuse himself (for wives, though they'll not confess it, adore husbands who at times give no explanations); and he could put the money aside, gradually withdrawing from the deposit whatever he could spare for his family's needs. Fifteen thousand lire were quite enough with which to move to Rome in due dignity, without depending upon Signora Giselda or returning to the office of the honourable Taramanna; they were enough with which to resume at last the truly free career and provide the party expenses and make an initial tour among the towns of his constituency. The rest would come soon enough of itself. Fortune, besieged for more than ten years, was opening a secret door for him by night. Now he was inside the stronghold. He would not lose it again.

At first the travellers had appeared sporadically, then they had begun to arrive in groups. Looking up from the bottom of the staircase, Filippo saw that a crowd was forming about the ticket-office window. Either Garlandi had come before him, or he had entered while Filippo was looking at the inscription and had not seen him. The appointment was for seven, at the track, and Garlandi was not the man to be behind time. Then Filippo ran up and joined the line before the window, to buy his ticket. What destination? Domodossola,

first class. But when he got out of the line it was already twenty minutes past seven, and fearing that he would not find a place he began to run, looking to right and left, for a compartment. No seating-room; the Sunday train was packed. He was quite content, however, for he could thus stand near the train window and review the procession of late travellers on the platform. Here came one of medium height, well built, as calm as if the train would not dare to leave without his permission.

The man resembled Garlandi.

"Gar . . ."

No, it was not he. "Very well, we'll meet at the first long stop."

He dozed through the ride along the level country, with one hand against the window and the other grasping his wallet. At Gallarete he got down, and running along the entire length of the train, began to call his companion under every window. But he disliked pronouncing his cognomen aloud in public. There was the news-vendor crying his papers and his time-tables, there was the restaurant boy shouting his chocolate biscuits and mineral waters, and there was he, Filippo, calling:

"Memè! Memè! Memè!"

It was just possible that Garlandi had found a comfortable corner seat and was now enjoying a deep slumber. At Arona, Filippo repeated his experiment, calling Memè on the other side of the train. It was hardly feasible to explore the coaches on the inside; not all of them communicated with each other, and, moreover, they were so crammed with passengers and luggage that one would have to make way for himself with his elbows. At Belgirate, however, he made the attempt. The aisle of the third coach was barricaded by a huge, tall traveller, with a monstrous double chin, who stood there with both his fleshy arms upon the backs of the seats. He was not to be moved.

"Are you looking for Memè? He's not here."

He did not even laugh; it was enough that the others did. Only his double-chin shook a little, with a gelatinous tremor. In the meantime the train had started and Filippo was not

able to get back to his compartment. He was compelled to remain there, facing his corpulent fellow-passenger, who from time to time would drop in his direction a sardonic look as heavy as a blow.

Stresa. It was a flower-bedecked station, and the name rustled like the swish of silk. He jumped down and gave his ticket at the gate. The lake at the bottom of the tiny slope was so smooth that one's eyes widened at the sight of it. He had never seen it before.

But the reflection of himself that he caught as he passed the window of a barber shop was less assuring. His cheeks were hollow, his wild pupils were set in sunken sockets, his temple artery was swollen. His beard was long, his shoes all covered with dust, his coat faded, his cuffs wilted from perspiration. The queerest detail of all was that he still had around his neck the handkerchief which he had instinctively placed there when he had begun to sweat at the height of the excitement. Now he understood why the passengers had laughed at sight of him.

"One thing at a time," he said to himself. And he arranged a sort of programme. First of all he would tidy up, then have a bite, thirdly, he would sleep for a few hours, and fourth and last, he would go for a walk. Rested and refreshed, strolling along the banks of the Lago Maggiore, he would find some logical solution to the Garlandi puzzle and likewise some practical way in which to adjust his imbroglio with Eugenia.

He carried this out to the dot. He selected a second-rate hotel whence the lake could be seen only aslant, but where he could have greater hopes of being waited upon by a more cheery proprietress. He told her that he had been travelling with his wife all night from Venice to Milan, without shutting an eye, and that his wife had stopped at Milan. She would soon join him, though he could not say whether on that day or the following. He did not know whether his wife had taken his bag by mistake, along with her own, or whether he had forgotten it on the train, or, for that matter, whether it had been robbed. He chose a room with two beds and

discussed the price, pro forma. Instead of his real name, he wrote, when he registered, Filippo Burè, taking care to keep talking about his hunger and his drowsiness in order to justify himself if the "error" should ever be discovered. He gratefully accepted the aid which, after a little reflection, was offered him. The proprietress knew a dry goods woman who could enter her store from an inner door of her lodgings, and sell him, though it was Sunday, a shirt, a collar, and whatever linens he needed for a change of clothing.

Garlandi was liquidated between a plate of asparagus and a cup of *grignolino*. Whether he had left for Paris with the morning train, or had waited, as was more reasonable to suppose, for the Orient Express, or had preferred the preferable Modane line, or—and this was the most likely case—had abandoned his fantastic project in the bath tub, what was undeniably certain was that he, Filippo, no longer was burdened with his company. Garlandi had been an instrument—and a somewhat uncleanly one—of Providence or of Fortune,—a spy predestined to point out to him the secret gate by which the stronghold of good luck might be taken. Not by sheer accident alone had he come upon him that dark night when he had arrived in Milan, when he was counting rather upon De Sonnaz! Now he had repaid him for his services by helping him with ten thousand lire at roulette (not a bad perquisite), and good-bye. He raised his filled beaker to the sun, and drank silently to Memè's health. For matters to become once more complicated and for Garlandi again to come into his life, it would require only Eugenia's going to Garlandi to learn news of her husband. Impossible! She would rather drown than be rescued by so much as Garlandi's little finger. But suppose Garlandi himself were to go to Eugenia for information about his "friend" who had disappeared, and then open his mouth round with astonishment upon hearing of a journey to Paris that he had proposed only in jest? Here the problem of Garlandi was grafted upon the far too serious one of Eugenia. It would be better to sleep on the matter.

But sleep was impossible. Yet once in bed he felt at ease, lulled most delightfully as if crystalline chimes held him

poised in mid air. Before three o'clock he was sauntering along the banks of the lake, his hands and his bamboo stick behind his back. The islets rose out of the quiet waters, and the Laveno mountain seemed like a tame, fireless Vesuvius. Little by little he collected himself, enumerating in logical order the possibilities afforded him of settling "the problem of Eugenia." First possibility: to return at once to Milan. Second: to remain for a few days at Stresa, alone, resting and catching his breath. But what boredom! Yet, who could tell? For fifteen years he had never had a day of genuine rest. This solitude, now that he had reached the mid-point of his life's journey, might do him good, confront him with himself, lead him to a minute examination of the past and to decisions that should guide the future. In short, it might give him a clear vision, and cleanse him like a moral catharsis. All of these possibilities possessed a common weakness. What explanation was he to offer to Eugenia? She was not jealous, but in such cases as these there is not a woman who does not suspect that her husband has run off with a rival. From suspicions to a scene, and from a scene to another of her attacks, to miscarriage, to tragedy, was only a matter of a few successive steps.

Two circumstances in these meditations attracted his curiosity. The first was his physiological happiness,—a softly rhythmed euphoria which the practical difficulties of the "problem" could not disturb in the slightest degree. He weighed these difficulties calmly, one by one, without losing the thread of his reasonings, and he could hear distinctly the sound of his inner words, pronounced with the utmost precision. The nocturnal ardour and the beakers of cognac were beautiful and enamelled, but within the beakers was left a translucent mist that dulled his emotions without befuddling his ideas. Eugenia's very stupor, perhaps terror, upon reading that incredible letter, appeared to him as a dumb show seen through a clouded glass; interesting, but not moving; too serious to move one to irony, too distant to waken pity. He knew very well that his soul had a double, even a triple, bottom, like the trunks of some smugglers, and that, if he were to

rummage deep enough down, he would find the last secret compartment, and within that compartment, this simple thought: that his cold frenzy for complicating matters was incomprehensible, and that in the long run, whether he went back to Milan or remained at the lake, no serious danger prevented him from confessing fully to Eugenia, whether by letter or in person, the exact state of affairs. He might parry her scorn with the triple armour of immediate consent to returning to Rome, of a vow never to gamble again, and another vow never again to associate with Garlandi. Reproaches soon blew over, while money remained for a while. But, for no discoverable reason, he did not yet dare to lay hands upon that compartment whose secret he knew only too well.

The other circumstance was more difficult of explanation. He was sauntering along the extreme end of the bank, with the waters to his left. His meditations had drawn him in this direction, and his eyes and his mind had turned toward it as those of an Alpine climber who is proceeding along the edge of a wide plain and has right at his side a precipitous declivity. Now, too, he felt the sensation of something lacking on the other side, and of walking no longer upon the plain but upon a very narrow crest that had at the right a barren, though practicable declivity, and at the left a deep gully. Looking out of the corner of his eye he saw plainly that these were only villas amidst few and pleasant hills, and that this sensation of cautious equilibrium was merely internal. Had he tried to express the inexpressible, he would have said that half of his soul,—that half which thought of Eugenia and of Milan,—had a clear, consistent surface, while the other half was sunk in a ravine of shadows, in a forgetfulness that had begun, perhaps, from the moment he had left the gambling den, in an enigmatic question that he could not answer, for he did not even know what the question asked. He even felt his left outside coat pocket, in sudden fear that he had lost his wallet, as if he did not know that his wallet was in his right inside pocket. More precisely, it seemed to him that his meditations upon Eugenia and the "practical problem" had been developed by the half orchestra of his soul, upon a sing-

ing or recitative theme, inconclusive and yet almost exhausted; and that from moment to moment he awaited with palpitating heart the entrance of a new theme blared forth by the brasses. By dint of delving into this uneasy state he became a prey to it, and removing his eyes from the enamelled mountains that concealed the view of the Lombard plain, he walked on very slowly, with his glance upon the ground and his ears cocked in the other direction. If any of the rare passers-by had observed him, they would have taken him for somebody who was retracing his steps in search of a precious object that he had lost.

The call came, instead, from the direction of the lake. He was in a deserted dell of camellias, before the Kursaal, when a boatman rowing over to him, asked:

"Boat, sir? To the Isola Bella?"

The voice was harmonious and discreet, although he, hearing it so unexpectedly, shuddered as though some one had come upon him from behind. As it crossed the beds of blooming camellias the voice seemed to assume the colour of flaming red.

He shook his head, and wagged his forefinger negatively. Lazily the boatman turned his prow toward Stresa.

This interruption threw him back into the rut of his customary reflections. There was a third possibility, as far as Eugenia was concerned: to write her, or telegraph her (it would be better to telegraph, without details), and invite her to join him at Stresa for one or two weeks yonder in that neatly painted inn, or further up on the mountain, at Mottarone, where the shining wagons of the electric train climbed the slope droning like huge flies. The clear, new atmosphere would evaporate all desire of disagreement. A honeymoon two months or four years late,—a tour such as those of the Roman Castles; with this difference, that his wallet was not so thin as then. Nor was Eugenia any longer thin. No, he would prefer to remain alone for a few days. But how was he to tell her that he was at Stresa, only two or three hours away, and not call her to him, without offending her brutally?

"It would be better that she should believe me at Paris.

She ought to receive at least a telegram, a letter bearing a Paris postmark. To whom am I to turn for such a favour? The friends I had there have mostly disappeared; others I've forgotten; I don't even remember the addresses and the names of some. For a matter of this kind I'd need a person *ad hoc*. I can't appeal, in an affair of this sort, for example, to Madame Celestine Lambert!"

Celestine's name burst from the shadows that had thickened around her memory and scattered them in an instant. He heard the echo of another name, Isola Bella, which still lingered in his ear; and from that contact there sputtered a shower of sparks which made him fairly reel. Regaining his composure he turned swiftly back and leaning over the lake with his hands on his bosom he cried:

"Boatman! To Isola Bella!"

He felt his voice reverberate over the waters. The sound was as strong as light. Certainly it was for this that he had played, that he had left home, that he had brought about his discharge from the service of the De Sonnaz brothers. An unconquerable instinct, finally, had led him toward his own Beautiful Isle,—that happiness upon earth toward which every mother's son, once in a lifetime, has the right to turn his prow, unless he be a pariah or a lost soul. That Celestine was summering at the Isola Bella there could not be the slightest doubt in the world; the events of that night and of that morning had obeyed an ineluctable logic. Two years before, she had told him that she would like to rest for a month at the Isola Bella during the first spring after the war; the past summer she had written him four English verses which he knew by heart: "Oh, if ever you should meet me again, in the light of a new April, look at me out of clear eyes and in a strong voice, tell me your name."

It was certain. It was certain. One thing alone amazed him,—that he had not assailed the fortunes of the game on the night of the 31st March, that he had not left for the Isola Bella at dawn of the 1st of April. Strange! Not even the night before, while he was winning, not even on the

street when Garlandi was tempting him to flee to Paris, not even during the train journey, had there flashed before his eyes the image of that most beautiful woman, whom he had not seen since the hour of wretched unhappiness they spent in the restaurant on the Outre-Seine. She had been buried alive, vanished amongst the financial troubles that beset him and the zinc-coloured mists of Milan! And now his prow was headed for the fortunate isle just past four o'clock in the afternoon of the 27th April, three days before the end of the month of terrestrial paradise promised him by destiny. Three days; they were enough to provide heavenly memories for his next thirty-five years,—memories that would sweeten his death.

At Isola Bella there were but a few modest inns. Disappointed, he paused before the first; then, with the certainty of his speech he tried to create by force the certainty of fact:

"Is Madame Lambert in her room?"

Madame Lambert? They knew no one by that name. She wasn't there. She never had been.

At the other places his question was more discreet, and he was disillusioned even before the answer came. And weren't there any foreigners in the villettas? French people? All to let as yet, they told him. Ever since the war had broken out no Englishmen or Germans came to the lake; the French had never come in large numbers, even before. There were about a half dozen foreigners ("Men? Women?" Men, sir,—they didn't quite recollect.) They had come sporadically, just that April, to visit the Borromeo gardens, and had returned to Stresa, or to Pallanza, without even having luncheon.

He hired a boat (he had dismissed the first one), and was rowed back to the dell of camellias before the Kursaal; he paid the boatman and resumed his stroll. Without and within him all was silence. He no longer thought anything. Distractedly he looked at the villas between the road and the hill, between the road and the lake. The few that were inhabited were beautiful, drinking in the calm darkness through their open windows. Even more beautiful were the deserted

ones, where the tea roses clambered on the shutters as if eavesdropping, growing pale in the solitude. Most beautiful of all, though not pompously so, seemed one to the left of the road, perhaps mid-way between Stresa and Baveno, with double-railed stairs on the outside and any number of blooming camellias that glowed like clouds at dawn. And other, deeper-hued camellias, in countless profusion, coloured the low garden, at the right, between the road and the lake, where a little pavilion rose from the sand-path. He stopped, with his hand upon the iron gate, looking toward the staircase, in the attitude of a beggar who recalled so many other visits to the forbidden portals of happiness.

But this villa was not deserted. There came the sounds of short and long cries, and of a sudden, before he could think of withdrawing, a young mother came running by on the sand-path, playfully chasing a child of about three who was dressed in blue velvet. They disappeared up the stairs and into the house. The mother was dressed in scarlet, like the camellias of her garden; during her short run he could catch sight only of her fluttering, bronze-gold tresses and a flame of joyful fire upon her ample forehead.

Then Filippo controlled his beating heart and opened the gate. The hinges seemed to sing, and his footsteps upon the gravel seemed to him like the sputter of the bubbles in a glass of champagne.

"Kindly announce me to Madame Lambert," he said, when the servant had opened the door.

"What name, please?"

"Captain Filippo Rubè," he replied, with a voice that filled the coolness of the vestibule.

She came swiftly into the parlour, warm and vibrant; whether from the effort of her recent chase or from surprise at the visit, it could not be said.

"You? You here?"

"I, here."

"How? How did you find out?"

"You yourself wrote me, eight months ago: 'Oh, if ever you should meet me again, in the light of a new April . . .'"

"Oh, but I had forgotten! I never even gave it a second thought!" She passed her hand across her eyes as if to dispel a dream. "Very well, but let's see. Granting it was so, how did you find the villa?"

"You've always told me that you'd like to take a rest at Isola Bella."

"But this isn't Isola Bella."

She was quivering too noticeably. She was almost trembling.

"This is not Isola Bella," she repeated. "You are right on one point: that I always realise what I desire. I'm obstinate, that's what. As a matter of fact I did go in search of quarters at Isola Bella. I liked the name. But your Beautiful Isle is uninhabitable. One would have to have a motor-launch not to die of pure boredom, and all I could find to hire was a tiny boat for my dock. Tell me, now, how did you locate my villa?"

"Why, that's very simple," he explained, in leisurely fashion. "The castle where the reddest camellias bloom could be only the castle of the red châtelaine."

"Ah, ah, ah!" and she laughed too loudly. "The red châtelaine! The lady of the camellias! *La Traviata!* 'Morir si giovane,' " she sang in Italian. "To die so young! Come, I've no desire to die young, not even from excess of laughter. Tell me the truth." And she stamped her foot impatiently.

"I've told you."

Then she stopped laughing altogether.

"Very well, my good friend, let's be serious. The tale you are trying to tell me is very nice, even brilliant, and indeed worthy of the fantastic Italian, the fiery Neapolitan, the romantic Signor Rubè whom we have all had the occasion to admire during the celebrated Trocadero soirées. There is only one thing amiss. It's not true. These things happen only in opera-ballets, and I sing opera-ballets for myself, when I feel like it; but I never live them. Nobody does. Tell me the truth."

"It is the truth," persisted Rubè, without moving his eyes from her face, where they were fixed, and without raising his

voice. "Yesterday morning I left Milan, a prey to an irresistible inspiration. I didn't even take my bag with me."

"So now it's inspiration, is it? Impostor! If inspiration came to you, then you should have been visited by . . . Answer me, how long have I been here?"

"I don't know."

"A fine clairvoyant! For twenty days, Sir Prophet," and she made the reckoning on her fingers. "Eight days at the inn, looking for a villa to rent, and twelve days in the villa. Your inspiration took a long time coming to you."

"Even inspiration doesn't run on schedule time during these post-bellum days, my dear friend. But it gets there."

She seemed now upon the verge of a genuinely angry outburst, such as did not easily come to her.

"Listen," she said, calming herself. "I entreat you to tell me the truth. Don't make me appear to be an idiot or I'll get raging mad. Life is prosaic. Let's see . . ." she reflected; then, pointing her forefinger at him: "You wrote to Paris for news of me. At last you made up your mind. You wrote to some one for my address. To Monnier. To the librarian Monnier!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Eureka! I've found it! I've unmasked the false prophet. Wait, now. Just a moment." And she dashed out, her dress swelling like a veil.

A half minute later she returned, still running, with a letter from Monnier in her hand, and she opened it before his very eyes, indicating a certain sentence.

"There. Received this very morning, with the single Sunday delivery. The devil Rubè brings me the saucepan, but the librarian Monnier sent me the cover in advance. Read this."

The sentence ran: "It may be that in the paradise where you are now hiding some saint can procure for you information relative to that strange, captivating young Italian, Signor Rubè, who disappeared so suddenly from Paris, leaving behind only a disquieting and undecipherable memory."

"I tell you upon my word of honour," said Filippo as he gave back the letter, "that I did not write to Monnier nor to any one else, and that what I've said to you is the gospel truth.

Monnier's very letter, if you study it carefully, proves what I say."

She was forced to yield, though she did not say so. The coincidence, just discovered, between Monnier's letter and Filippo's visit, weighed her down with an inexplicable sense of oppression that was translated upon her face into a bewildered pallor. All she said was: "Assez! Assez!" as when she was hearing something that moved her feelings too deeply. She grew sullen. Then she was silent.

"Shall I send for a cup of tea?" she asked, a little later, with her eyes staring into space.

"Yes, thanks, as you please."

The conversation was fragmentary and distraught, utterly devoid of gaiety. To enliven it, she called, with a cheeriness that sounded artificial, "Henri, Henri!" and snatched her child up into her strong arms, fairly smothering him with kisses. She introduced him to "Signor Rubè, our old friend. Italian, —see? A sparrow of these beautiful parts,—but you've surely seen him at our home in Paris and can not recall him. He's a prophet by profession." The little boy bravely stuck out his hand to the prophet and ran off.

In response to Filippo's questions she replied with scant details. Edouard, "her general," was in Rumania on a mission. Pierre and Jean had entered the lycée a short time before; Charles had gone to Aunt Catherine, who must have him at all costs. But not the little fellow; she wouldn't lend him to anybody, and had taken him along with the governess. Other brats? No, in God's name. For the rest, "her general" did not work from a distance, like Big Bertha. Music? There wasn't a piano to be had in all Italy for its weight in gold. Salon? Closed a year ago until further orders. "Her general" was expecting to return to France before summer. Then they'd go to the regular seashore, after which they'd re-open their house and salon in Paris. Too bad that he, Rubè, was no longer at Paris! The Trocadero soirées were so much more interesting when "her general" was present. She had rented the villa on the lake for two months. She was taking a real rest. She read little. She slept until late in the

morning. Then she went for a stroll and a row. She herself rowed.

Point blank she asked him:

"And you married her?"

"Who?"

"Who? Who! Why, the one that you were in duty bound to marry. What a rogue!"

Filippo shook his head.

"No-o-o?"

He nodded Yes.

"And are you happy?"

"Yes. To-day. This evening."

"Is your wife with you?"

He laughed.

At a loss what else to say, she asked, again:

"And when do you expect to return to Milan?"

"I don't know."

There was another pause.

"Where did you find lodgings?"

She felt an absurd fear that he was about to ask her for hospitality.

He named his inn.

"I don't know the place. Where is it?"

"Come and see. Let's take a walk before dinner."

"Yes, let's go to see it," said Celestine, quickly, as if she were compelled to obey him.

"As General Cantore said."

"As who said?" she asked, when they had left the gate behind. She had not heard him plainly. "As who said?"

"As General Cantore said."

"Who was he?"

"A brave Italian general. Whenever they told him that there was a dangerous position, he would answer: 'Let's go to see it.' And he really went."

"And how did he come out?"

"With a bullet that wasn't quite so tame as the one that struck me."

"Ah," she said, instinctively stepping away from him.

"No fear. I've been demobilised and am unarmed. I haven't even a cannon in my pocket. All I have is this," and he waved his bamboo stick.

Though he was a trifle shorter than she, she felt dominated by his presence.

"How you have changed," she said to him.

"That line, too," he answered, "comes from *La Traviata*."

Now she laughed a short laugh. When they reached the bend from which his inn could be seen, she stopped.

"Ah, I see. That's the one. I knew it. I simply didn't know the name."

"Come as far as the door."

The proprietress stood on the threshold. When she saw the woman she bowed low to so beautiful a lady, and exclaimed:

"Ah, your wife has arrived! . . . And did you find the bag?"

"The bags," replied Filippo, "my wife left at the villa of some friends. Come up," he added, in Italian, turning to Celestine.

She preceded him up the stairs. When he had closed the door he saw and heard nothing but the rush of his blood and a red dimness, as if he could behold his own heart before his eyes. She did not abandon herself to him; she came forward to meet him as if bearing a wreath. And surely she made no outcry, yet for hours and days his brain resounded with an acute, lacerating cry of joy and struggle.

The days that followed brought no novelty.

There were the clouds and the clear weather, May showers and radiant skies, sudden hot waves followed by gentle evening zephyrs.

At the Stresa inn they often preferred the meadows among the chestnut trees, the ferns in the ravine, the cushions of the boat moored in a solitary nook. At times, during moonlit nights, Filippo would vault Celestine's window-sill.

The boat, whose keel was entirely white and whose gunwales were sorrel, they christened *Balzano da quattro*. The Horse with the Four White Feet. They rowed up and down the lake. During the hottest noons Celestine, in her tight-fitting

bathing suit, covered with a long silk tunic, would row around the camellia dell, where Filippo would join her in bathing suit and pajama. They would dive into the water from the boat with a shout.

"With all these escapades some fine day we'll drown," Celestine would say, splashing him with a well-directed shower.

"No fear," he answered, brushing back his shining hair across his forehead. "I learned to swim on Long Island."

There wasn't a nook or cranny in the central part of the lake that they did not visit. Only Filippo balked at Intra, nor would he say why he refused to go; he disliked passing the Adsum factory, and was afraid he might encounter one of the De Sonnaz brothers.

One afternoon Celestine dragged him thither by force. They did not like the roads. But she heard the sounds of music and led Filippo by the hand to the place whence the strains were coming.

Some persons, in a low cottage, were playing a trio. At the back of the little yard they could glimpse a garden. As they made their way into the yard the violoncello was playing a solo. Celestine opened her lips and sang "Oh, oh, oh, oh," repeating softly the plaints of the instrument. She beat time with her hands, brushing her friend's hair as she did so, and brushing his cheek, too, with the breath of her song.

Never had he heard such ecstatic lamentation. Never had he seen anything to compare with the rosy-hued palate of Celestine and the fresh teeth whence the melody issued. And he grew as pale as if he were at the point of death.

Three weeks had passed. Every evening the moon rose later and less full, over the balcony of the Lombard mountains.

CHAPTER V

Filippo solved the "practical problem" with exceeding promptness. Before two full days had passed after his arrival at Stresa, on Tuesday morning, he had hired a motor car and had travelled as far as Domodossola. This means of transportation cost him some hundred lire, but after going over the comparative figures and consulting the train schedules he found that he preferred it to the railroad which, with the run, the wait, and the return, would have compelled him to sacrifice his afternoon appointment with Celestine. At Domodossola he mailed a special delivery letter to Eugenia, dated two days back.

The letter was composed with a shrewdness calculated to defy the most alert incredulity. It began with a frank confession of the deception. The money that he had left at home and the rest of it that he had with him (he gave the exact figures), had been won at gambling. Knowing how Eugenia looked upon such things, he had not dared to tell her, and it was owing to this stupid, panicky fear, so like to many another fear and phobia that had poisoned his existence, added to a little cognac and the strain of having played feverishly right through the previous night, that he had been seized by this impulse to run away. It was the first time that he had gambled heavily, and he had been drawn into it by Garlandi and by despair. As to Garlandi, he didn't mind admitting that there was a bit of good in the fellow, but that he was a sort of evil genius. He had seen Garlandi murder a poor mother's son in cold blood, out of mere opportunism, so that he cared less for the man than even she did. But when your soul is upset, the devil can send a false guardian angel to mislead you. Eugenia might be very sure that, if that had been his first night of gambling, it was his last as

well; nor was there any need of solemn promises, for no one knew better than she how hard he had always worked in hopes of salvation through labour and never adopting hazardous expedients. Taste for adventure didn't run in his blood. In fact, if at certain times he had been somewhat bolder, he would be the richer for it to-day. For the rest, this was not stolen money, and there was no harm done if that Fortune which he had so long been pursuing had decided as an exception to show him a little favour. Considering the matter well, he had had only two lucky strokes in almost thirty-five years of life. The first had been the fortunate wound in the battle of the Altipiani, and the second, this gambling victory. So that fate still remained his debtor. At this point he had to recopy the entire letter so as to revise the last sentences and say that the lucky strokes had been three in number: the wound, his big winnings, and his first meeting with Eugenia, eight years before, at the Rustica.

He did not enjoy deceiving her. His mind, as it ran over the composition of the letter, was free of irony or any spirit of trickery. If there were any definite feeling, it was one of transparent satisfaction, such as the mathematician feels when, after his course of reasoning, he comes to the Q. E.D, —an intellectual pleasure in one's skill. Now came the second part of the letter, the thought of which had cost him some vexation; it recalled to him the rotten oranges which the dealers of Campagnammare conceal beneath the beautiful fruit at the top of the crates meant for export. But so persuasive were the likeliness and the veracity of the first pages that he felt encouraged to go on, thus creating in himself a spirit of belief in what he wrote.

Garlandi, as they left the gambling house, had suggested a pleasure trip to Paris, and he, in order to save talk and also because he hated to face his wife the morning after, had answered a feeble Yes. Garlandi, he had felt, had without a doubt suggested the idea out of sheer idleness, and would surely not be there at the station; and, indeed, he had not turned up. Nor was there anything attractive to him in the idea of touring Europe under the May sun with that nocturnal

companion. But in him, Filippo, the notion of a trip to Paris had been neither impulsive nor borrowed; on the contrary, for some time—and especially since he had received from his mother that sceptical letter regarding the agrarian syndicate of Calinni—he had been thinking of going back for a few days to the city where he still had a few friends and acquaintances, and where a fellow engineer of his was founding a company, with branches in Brussels and London, that would market in the west the fruits and vegetables of southern Italy which before the war had been sold to Germany. He wished to get into touch with this man and pull Calinni into line, working from the outside upon the chief centre of the region, where a courageous, modern project could attract open-minded merchants. It was easy to understand how he had resolved in so fantastic a manner upon so practical a journey. He had suddenly come upon the means; he had struck good luck, of which he meant to take advantage without delay, just as the mariner does with a favouring wind after he has been too long becalmed; and, finally, there was the obsessive fear of another altercation with Eugenia.

He knew perfectly well that his passport was null and void, —so well, indeed, that he had left it in his drawer; but they had told him that the formalities of crossing the border were now greatly simplified and that whoever had a friend at the boundary stations could have the matter settled in a few hours. This information had proved erroneous. But the friend that he had at the Domodossola station (a fellow from Verona who had been a lieutenant of the Alpine troops in his same batallion), had been equally useful to him in giving him notes of introduction to the Police Headquarters and the French Consul at Turin. Of course, he could have made a flying trip to Milan and embrace his wife, but he preferred, after the extravagance of that morning, to explain everything to her, to beg forgiveness in writing; and he did not doubt that this woman who had cured him forever of all other fears would pardon him this last fear. He expected now to leave within twenty-four to forty-eight hours, via Modane. Let her be calm and see to her health, caring diligently for the little

Rubè whom she carried in her bosom. Let her not trouble about his underwear, for his shirts were so threadbare and his socks so knotted and his bag so banged up, that the opportunity to replenish his supply at Paris, where the best of these goods could be got at the lowest prices, was nothing less than providential.

If she wished to leave at once for Rome, she might feel free to do so, though he could not help writing that he preferred her to wait for him at Milan, so that they might make the trip to Rome together and not give folks any food for gossip. If things went as he hoped they would, and he didn't absolutely have to go on to London or Brussels, he expected to be back in Italy within one or two weeks, and under no circumstances would he be away later than the 15th June. And finally, let her not worry if she received few letters, far apart, for he could not tell just what his itinerary would be, and the postal service like all other public utilities was so crippled that one looked back with longing to the good old war times "after which, instead of the peace that we all expected, has come this curse from God which is called after-war, because no more appropriate name can be found for it."

It may be well understood that things would have been better if the Domodossola express had left Sunday instead of Tuesday. But, considering all things, Filippo was an optimist. He knew that Eugenia was too proud to seek confidants to whom to entrust her affairs, and that she was too religious, if not strictly observant, to commit any follies. She was delicate in health, but not frail, and she had never suffered any serious illness, nor was she of the sort that succumbs to a sorrow. At worst he could suppose that she had packed her things and gone back to her father's, so that, with such possibilities in mind, Filippo had added upon the envelope, "Please Forward."

Now he felt content, and not only with the dewy atmosphere that fluttered with almost visible wings through the open automobile. Two feelings of almost equal weight maintained him in a salutary spiritual equilibrium. On the one hand

he was happy to have done "as much as was in him" to calm Eugenia; on the other, this altruistic complaisance was balanced by the tranquil consciousness of having destroyed the remorse that threatened to rise between him and happiness. He had conquered liberty, and with his mind's eye raised aloft he beheld the great word Liberty as a huge banner placed upon the topmost summit of the highest mountain, against the horizon. He felt that he was rather a strategist than a lawyer, —the author of a masterly plan of a retreat in good order after this plunge into the absolute. He harboured in his bosom no romantic urge to sacrifice his son, his wife, Celestine, himself,—to create melodramas or tragedies. He was "truly" free, reasonable, clear, and knew very well that on the 16th June, Celestine having returned to her husband's house, he would return with his wife to Rome, to resume his professional career and the political contest. But how different from the Filippo Rubè of Saturday night! How altered in soul, now that life had spoken all her Yeas and granted him a happy tranquillity, a stroke of fortune, and love! However long the road might be, never would the echo of these flourishing trumpets die out, never would his blood flow sluggish where there was a glowing torch to kindle his passion for life and conquest. No more starless nights above his head!

To complete his work Eugenia must receive some letters bearing a Paris post-mark. And this was the hardest part of all. He hesitated for several days before broaching the matter to Celestine.

"Listen, Happiness." He called her Happiness, Innocence, Celestial Paradise, and when she wore less than usual, she became Eve. "You ought to be able to find some way of having a letter of mine mailed from Paris."

"Ah! And to whom?"

"Why, to her whom I was in duty bound to marry."

"Yes, my dear friend, but I have no men or women friends, nor servants who are in the habit of doing such favours for me. Bah," she added after having for a moment placed her forefinger against her chin, "I can manage this, too."

Whereupon Filippo extracted the open envelope from his

pocket, while she, bringing the back of the flap to his lips, said, "Kindly trouble your tongue for a moment," and made him seal it.

Her way out was of the most elementary sort. Without a word of it to Filippo, she went directly after luncheon to the Baveno station, and having hopped upon a wagon-step of the Orient Express she said to the conductor of the sleeping-car, looking straight into his eyes:

"Stick on a twenty-five centime stamp and a French special delivery and mail it from Paris, won't you, please?"

And to make sure that he "pleased," she put twenty-five francs into his hand. The same incident was repeated five times, at almost regular intervals. Only there was no way of obtaining through Celestine some address to which Eugenia might send her replies, and he felt sorrow not to have word of his wife. He remedied this by notifying her to address her letters to General Delivery, Paris, and writing the Post Office there, in turn, to redirect his mail to Stresa. But he received none. He kept writing favourable reports to her, though nothing conclusive, and informed her of a flying trip that he would very soon have to make to London or to Brussels or Antwerp (where a new branch was being established), or else he told her about his previous trip; he thought it very likely that he would return to Milan the following week, but he could not promise for certain; what he did emphasise without deviation was the certainty of greeting his wife no later than the 16th June. One night, in Celestine's room, he came upon four picture post-cards representing Parisian views; she had brought them by accident to Italy with all her letter paper. He appropriated them, and wrote one to Giacone, one to Colonel Berti, one to his mother, and one, finally, to Federico.

"Confess, now," said Celestine to him, sticking out of the sheets a tiny foot as full as a tuberose, "that there's not a diplomatic courier as skilful as I in all the chancelleries of Europe."

At daybreak on Sunday it required several minutes of ardent effort before Eugenia could gather the strength to arise, and

she crossed the short corridor in the dark, almost fearing to behold a horrible reality. Though she had heard distinctly the footsteps of her husband as he had made off in his stocking feet, she imagined him with his exhausted body lying on the floor, his bloody head sunk upon the edge of the sofa; he who had closed the door was the assassin.

Pausing upon the threshold she thrust her head toward that corner of the parlour and saw nothing the colour of blood except the velvet on the console. But the light left burning by the fugitive on the tiny secretary lent a yellow pallor to the early glow of dawn and increased her horror. Her eyes, which at that moment seemed without lashes, were fascinated by the metallic edge of the lampshade that described so many luminous, consecutive v's and m's. *Vita, Morte, Morte, Vita.* Life, Death, Death, Life. Then she collected herself and having seized and opened the letter that lay beneath the light she read it in a single impetuous glance that grasped simultaneously the first and last line. The true misfortune was so much less than what she had imagined that it came almost as a consolation. Filippo was not dead. He was dead only for her.

She went back to bed, with her hands upon her stomach, as if to soothe her breathing and protect her maternity from herself. For three days she did not leave the house nor did she write or speak to a living soul, except the few words exchanged through necessity with the old lady who came in for a half day's work; her she told "my husband is on a journey." To Roberto De Sonnaz, who, strangely enough, wrote to inform her that he was coming on a visit, she sent word that she was ill and would not be up for some time, and that she would write to him as soon as she felt better. On the night of the third day she received the letter from Domodossola. She read it twice in succession, with not a twitch in her face, nor, so it seemed to her, in her heart. She did not wrack her brains to analyse it phrase by phrase, for the very perfection of its composition, the very excess of verisimilitude, betrayed the deception. She gave up all attempt at guessing just what had really happened. And, with her fingers en-

twined about her knee, she understood that during those three days of solitude she had already come to certain decisions.

The first was, not to delve into the past or cultivate any remorse. This maniacal self-introspection, this adoption of a convex lens to magnify the slightest things and reason them out (and, as Filippo explained, the lens concentrated the rays of the sun and burned what it was supposed to clarify), were among the chief causes of Filippo's ruination. And she had no right to ruin herself. At once, then, she brushed aside all temptation to analyse herself,—as she had done on Sunday—with certain fantastic gestures which, thinking them over, filled her with dismay, as if her husband had tainted her with a contagion beyond all cure. All that day she had been condemning herself for having felt love and pity; for having surrendered herself without defending with might and main her virginal honour; for having "forced" into marriage "that poor fellow," perhaps more out of desire to wipe out her disgrace than out of any faith in him. Certain distant words of Federico kept beating in her ears: "You make everything more burdensome . . . your sadness is a bad omen. . . ." And certain other words of Federico's, nearer than the first: "You ought to be his norm, his law, his good will."

"Yes," she said to herself, "that's what I should have been, but I was unequal to the task, and all I've done is hasten his fall. Everything went awry in my father's family, and I was never able to forestall or remedy a misfortune; and now in my own home everything's gone as badly as possible, and it's the same story over again. I'm just like my poor father in this inertia, this incapacity for initiative that attracts ill luck." Gliding down, down this slope she reached the bottom, where she found all the rest innocent and only herself guilty. But now this was over. Now she had decided that the past was the past, and if she was to blame, then God surely must have forgiven her, in view of all her sufferings, God, whom she regarded more with obedience than with tenderness, as a child regards a father who is too severe,—quite the contrary to the case of her poor father yonder.

She knew that her duty was to gird herself entirely for the

future, and that the future was her child. She could see him already; he resembled Filippo, surely, but, if God were good, without that sad bulging vein on his temple, and with more tranquil eyes. Already she spoke to him, without the coaxing endearments of happy motherhood; she called him Demetrio. For it was already understood between them that if a boy were born he would be christened with that name,—the name of his dead grandfather; but they had not yet agreed upon a name for a possible girl. Filippo did not wish to call her Giulia after Eugenia's mother, so as not to duplicate thus the name of Federico's daughter.

Her other decisions were practical ones. Not to move from Milan, where she could be left by herself and so avoid the necessity of explanations; to go out walking during unusual hours and in unfrequented spots, only as a hygienic precaution; for her pregnancy, which had been painful from the start, still continued so; to stop visiting; to restrict her further relations to those with Signora Restori, who might, should the need arise, be discreetly serviceable to her. Above all, not to touch at any cost the five thousand lire, and to ask her father—on some pretext that was not so easy to invent—for a short loan of a thousand lire. Sooner or later the enigma would be solved, and there would be some way of regulating her economic relations with her mother and father, of procuring a legal separation from her husband without any attendant scandal, of providing for all the cold, bitter contingencies that such catastrophes carry in their wake. She felt certain, moreover, that this period of darkness would not last very long; and, while she did not believe Filippo's account for a moment, from the texture of his letter she isolated a single thread which from the very start she had stamped with certainty, through an impulsiveness that soon became superstitious. She genuinely believed that the 15th of June was the extreme boundary of his absence.

She wrote to her father that Filippo had left for foreign parts on a certain business deal, and that his absence, at first limited to a week, but now by unforeseen circumstances been protracted through the whole of May and even for a small

part of June. She asked her parents not to mention anything about the affair, since its "eventual" failure might discredit him professionally. In the meantime she had been left without much money, and Filippo, who only by accident had taken along enough funds for so long a trip, did not find it very feasible to send her any from where he was. There was, to be sure, a bank book with a deposit representing five thousand lire, but without any note authorising the wife to draw. So that she asked her father, with the consent of Filippo, to lend her a thousand lire, and the account would be settled upon the return of her husband.

Before the end of the week she visited Giacone's. She brought him greetings from Filippo, who was travelling on a certain business proposition and was sorry not to have been able to see him personally before leaving. Giacone shook his head as one who listens benevolently to the deeds of a good-natured rogue.

"He'll be back not later than the 15th June," added Eugenia.

"Fine. Excellent. We'll be glad to see him back. At his place. At his desk. At that desk, there."

He smiled complimentarily, speaking with a mere thread of voice. And he stretched out his right hand, palm upturned, as if inviting Filippo to take a seat.

Her father replied without delay, sending her five hundred lire and promising her the other five hundred before the middle of the month. Now that "mamma" was at home he could send her four hundred every month as a help in constructing his adored daughter's nest. Would she please accept these thousand lire as an addition to her too meagre wedding gift? But why didn't she make up her mind to come to Rome, where her furniture was, instead of continuing to pay storage expenses, which was a sort of "paying rent to the wood worms." Surely she could not be harbouring the melancholy notion of giving birth to his grandson in that treacherous climate. Demetrio roused little enthusiasm in his bosom; the name was too "hieratic." And finally, let her not forget to give his fraternal regards to his old colleague Restori. In

the same envelope there was a letter from mamma, and a rather diffuse one it was. She was happy to be breathing the good air of the Tufo, which was rejuvenating her, and to be tending to her old man, who needed her ministrations. They had excellent news from Marco in New York. The *Italiano d'America* was being changed to a daily and they had taken him back; and the illness that he had caught in the service of his country (that same country which afterwards discharged "its most expert colonels of artillery as if they were unfaithful servants") was taking a favourable turn. In short, the only thing lacking to Signora Giselda's complete peace of mind was to have Eugenia near her, and instead, there she was, pregnant, with her husband off on a travelling trip,—at Milan, with her mother trembling at the knowledge that she was exposed to all sorts of dangers, for that city was inhabited only by Bolsheviki and free-living novelists. But, there; this daughter had always insisted on doing things in her own way.

In the settling of these matters, and even in the writing or telling of the indispensable lies (and she had considered it indispensable to inform Signora Giulia at Calinni of Filippo's journey), Eugenia was filled with a sensation of scrupulous and inodorous cleanliness, like the patient convalescing from a dangerous illness, entering the bed where the sheets have been changed. Her conscience was clear on every score, except that of Filippo. That his departure was an irreparable catastrophe to their family life was altogether beyond doubt; but in Filippo's social life, which was important in relation to Demetrio's future, it might be of only passing moment,—a mere episode. It was neither certain nor probable that he had committed a theft or a crime; and perhaps he had fled for no other reason than that he wanted "a good time" after so many months of oppression and care in which she, who had not been able to give him joy, had also her share of responsibility. And suppose now, far from everybody, except perhaps that evil influence, Garlandi, he was succumbing to worse temptations? Suppose he was losing his reason? Was it not her duty to hunt him out, to stretch out her hand—if not a wifely, then at

least a sisterly hand—to save him who was, perhaps, drowning and yet was ashamed to cry for help? Was it not her part to take the first step for lack of which so many evils came to pass? It even seemed to her a sin of pride to turn all these terrible thoughts in her mind without confiding in anybody, and that Demetrio might some day call her to account for that sin. So that, before receiving the first letter dated from Paris, she decided to write to Federico for advice; but naturally she addressed him through Mary.

"Dear Mary," she wrote, entreating her to keep the secret absolutely hidden, "you and Federico wanted me to be Filippo's norm and good will, but I have failed. On the night of the 27th April he came home after four in the morning, and before five he had left on tip-toe and I haven't seen him since. Perhaps I should have held him back, but my strength failed me. He left me a letter, and he sent, or had some one send to me, from Domodossola, another dated the 27th but which I received on the night of the 29th. I have copied them word for word and I enclose the copies herewith. Perhaps you and Federico will be able to make more out of them than my poor head can do. I believe I know my duty toward myself and the little creature I bear in my bosom, but as to Filippo I am uncertain. Ought I look for him and help him if he needs me? But how? Forgive me for troubling you, dear, but I haven't anybody in the world to go to for advice except Federico and you."

This time the answer was delayed a few days, for the letter reached the hill in Arezzo on a morning that was most beautiful on land and in the sky, but dark indeed in Mary's home. For the past week Gioia had been ill; in fact, they had not dared to call her Joy, and had returned to her former name of Juja. The work of restoring the Villa had been postponed from one day to the next. The physician had diagnosed the case as one of intestinal infection, with rather favourable outlook unless complications should set in and endanger the child. But the father and mother were mistrustful, each for different reasons, which they did not communicate to each other. Federico was troubled not so much by the wasted, earthen-hued little face that seemed to have been passed over by an evil breath, nor

by the heavenly little round, lightless eyes that seemed to peer into who knows where, as by the odour that rose from the child's head. At first this odour was dry and aromatic, smelling of the nest; now it was heavy, repulsive, like that which rises from the wash when it is turning cold. Mary, on her side, was tormented by evil presentiments. Their cook was a woman from Piemonte who had corrupted Gioia's speech and had taught her, instead of *cogliere* (pluck) to say *cattare*. Throughout April the rose-bushes at the gate had put forth so many roses that passers-by would look at no other in that section of the road, and the country folk coming by that way would pluck one of the flowers that hung furthermost into the road, walking off with it in their hands. Then Gioia, who would be standing behind the gate, reaching not even to the top of the wall, would come out, blonde, well-fed, blazing with infantile anger, and taking three steps forward as if she were about to bite the robbers, would cry out:

"Don't take the roses. I don't want you to."

The marauders would smile. Some would turn back and with a low bow restore the purloined flower to the child.

Now, in the delirium of fever, Juja kept repeating without end, "Don't take the roses. Don't take them!"

"Oh, Lord, don't pluck this rose," prayed Mary to herself. "You have so many others in Paradise."

On the very morning that brought Eugenia's letter the physician was compelled to nod gravely to Federico's and Mary's silence, admitting that there was danger. All that day father and mother did not look into each other's eyes. He lay buried in an armchair, thinking that if "they" had taken his leg "they" weren't going to worry about leaving him the rest. Out of his entrails he felt issue a howl that was far more sinister than the one he let forth when he saw them sever his bleeding stump, and he knew only that it was not permitted to howl.

Mary answered her friend two days later. "Genia dear, your husband's letters are serious, but there's no cause yet for despair; Federico believes that you can do nothing for the present. His advice is: wait, endure. That's my opinion, too. We'd

love to have you here with us in these, your days of bitterness. But our home can offer you no solace. Dear, that is why I did not answer you at once; neither has Federico the heart to write to you to-day. Juja has been very ill and we had given her up as lost. Now we have a thread of hope. Pray for my child as I pray for your husband and the little one that's coming."

But, as she was finishing her letter Federico came in, tapping the floor with his wooden foot, and wished to add a few lines. "You could easily make inquiries through the Turin Police Headquarters or at the frontiers. But I advise against that. His letters say one thing very clearly,—that he has not fled forever, and that he will come back. For the present, wait. Offer up your affliction to that which is dearest within you."

Eugenia accepted this advice, which was precisely what her own heart had suggested to her. Wherefore stolidly she read the letters that came at regular intervals from Paris, without any vain efforts to penetrate to the truth behind them. Once Garlandi wrote her a letter, upon bluish stationery, with a count's coronet engraved at the head, asking permission to "present his compliments in person." She started, for she had been firm in the belief that Garlandi was with Filippo, and this news that Garlandi was at Milan made her suppose for a moment that Filippo might be hiding in some nearby place, and perhaps in the city itself. But she did not reply. The middle of that month she gave notice that she was leaving her apartment on the first; a few days later she spoke to Signora Restori.

"I didn't care to renew the lease, because I'd have had to pay three months in advance, and Filippo intends to settle down in Rome as soon as he returns. But I'm not at all sure that he'll be back this month or early in June; he'll surely not be away longer than the 15th, however. If my husband does not come back by next Saturday, Signora Restori, you'll let me stay with you, won't you, for a week or two at most? I'm so sorry to trouble you, but I'd hate to go to a hotel."

"My darling daughter!" cried Signora Restori effusively,

opening her arms and thrusting her kindly, tiny hen's neck up out of her collar, "I'll receive you as if you were a child of my very own! For a week, for a month, for as long as you please. Your father and my husband were as close as brothers. The room I can give you is small, for we're in rather close quarters, but it's a soft bed. And listen"—she added in a lower voice, with an intuition that seemed to Eugenia as deep as the discovery of America—"don't worry. Young husbands are all like that. Then with the coming of the years their ardour simmers down. If you only knew the time Colonel Restori gave me when he was a young lieutenant, and what a madcap he was."

In all truth it was hard to imagine good old Colonel Restori —with the soft moustache that fell over his lips and his yellow cranium covered with lumps like the pastry when the housewife rolls it,—as ever having been a gay young spark. Eugenia herself, with all the worries that beset her, could not repress a smile.

The closing weeks of May brought several novelties to the lovers upon the lake. The most noisy was a motor that Celestine managed to find and have attached to the boat; and now, indeed, the *Balzana da quattro* galloped over the green waters like a colt in the pasture. Filippo had learned a few things at war, with his motorcycle, but he was no perfect mechanic, and often he would lose control of the motor, amidst the loud laughter of his companion. Then they would have to take to the oars, and there were sudden turns, fantastic stops, strange returns amid the changed and hostile weather, with the aid of a boat that took them in tow or of a mechanic that repaired the motor, or of two rowers hired at Luino or at Laveno.

Henri and the governess, too, adored the vibrations of the little machine and the long, shining wake the boat left behind. Filippo took them along several times, trying to make friends with the youngster through a fishing-rod that he never finished and with the governess through the artistic picture post-cards of the painter Laforêt. But Celestine gave all the morning to amusing her little child; and at night she saw to the house.

Twice a week she wrote to Bucharest,—to her general, who hoped to return ("to civilisation") before the designated time. She gave only five minutes of the morning to Filippo. She would run out to a dell in the chestnut grove, which they called their secret garden, and here he would be waiting for her; she would wish him Good-day, Good-day, kiss him as she pressed his head between her rosy hands, and then dash back. But she gave him all the afternoon, joining him by rowboat, if the weather were very fair, at the camellia bed or at the foot of the dell, or on the shore near the forest. She rarely received him at the villa for fear that Henri should become jealous; and she invited him to dinner but twice, and then only to preserve appearances before the servants and have a good reason to go to him two nights when he returned the invitation.

Another novelty, less noisy, was the piano, which she had finally succeeded in hiring for a month, paying "an eye out of her head" for the transportation. She hardly ever opened it, because she hadn't the time, and also because, as the movers were dragging it toward the house among the camellias of the garden, it had struck her unpleasantly and "as black as a coffin." She preferred to go to Intra from time to time, where they could hear the trio every other day. During these walks she was often seized with a mania for exactness; she would consult guide-books and maps; she would look for information, spreading her hand across the page that sang the praises of a rare sight.

"Where are these 'most beautiful eucalypti' of the lake?"

She spoke a sonorous Italian, slightly angular, which seemed something altogether new and never before pronounced. They told her that the most beautiful eucalypti of the lake were to be found on the road to Ghiffa, yes, further along in that direction, a few kilometres beyond La Crocetta.

"And what sort of thing is this *Crocieta?*"

They didn't know. That was its name. A passer-by explained that formerly on that spot a cross arose in memory of a young couple, the first born of two Intra families, Cantova and Imperatori, who had died together in the lake.

"Can this beautiful lake be so wicked?"

"It can, on rare occasions."

They also told her about the famous wreck of the torpedo-boat, and the various heights to which floods had reached, and they explained to her the names of the different winds. She gazed serenely toward the pastoral banks of Caldé, and in company of her friend took the road back.

When she visited San Remigio, she descended the staircase of the Giardino della Maliconia absorbed in a song that did not come to her lips. In the counterfeit necropolises where the tombs flattened against one another like huge tortoises amidst the colonnade of dragon trees, she hung with a somewhat voluptuously dramatic gesture upon Filippo's neck and said:

"I would wish to live and die with you."

But she knew that this was not possible, so she laughed most sociably.

In certain respects her taste had changed. She no longer affected red. Red made her "see red," and that hue seemed to her more agreeable, more "hers," under the tempered skies of France. Now she often wore a very pale rose, such as that which tints the snow toward dusk; and when she was garbed thus there was nothing, save Mount Zeda, which concentrated so much light as her person.

On their way they had little to say. In the boat, rowing, they would chant: "Hé, hop! Hé, hop!" Once Filippo asked her:

"Paradise, why were you so afraid, and even a mite angry, when I appeared to you at Baveno? At Paris you had come to the Restaurant Lapérouse."

"At Paris," she replied seriously, "it was I who wished it. No, no, naughty man, don't make me talk nonsense. I don't know whether I wished it or what I wished. But I was free. And you were afraid. Yes, you were ill. This time, on the other hand, it was no longer a thing of my own doing. It was an absurd coincidence, a trick of fate that had brutally mastered me. I don't like to have fate do things to me. I want to be the one that wishes them. And I was afraid," she

added, imparting a velvety timbre to her voice so that it might sound playful, but gazing directly into his eyes, "that you might kill me, in the Italian manner."

And she laughed with him.

Another time he asked:

"Why do you love me?"

She reflected for a single instant, then replied:

"Because you attract me."

She saw that he was offended, as if he had been expecting words of praise. She called him back.

"Phili."

Her voice had an intonation that Filippo had never remarked, and it made him tremble. It resembled that of his mother, when he was a sad child and she called him Filì.

"Phili, why don't you ever speak to me about your future, about your life, about yourself? Why do you treat me as a mere mistress? I'm your friend."

"My life," he said, "is this, here, now. My future will be only a survival."

They spent quivering hours, starting out at first rather leisurely, and then breaking into a run, on the slopes in quest of the desert beneath the sky. She would throw herself down with a pounding heart, would hold her bosom to contain this unbearable throbbing, and would groan, *"Assez, Assez!"* At such times he had neither remorse nor hope; he felt as perfect and mortal as a tree in flower.

He knew that his happiness had already lasted too long, and that at moments it weighed upon him. But he could not see what else he could ever exchange it for. In truth the earth did not turn, and all mutation had been suspended. The way back, which had appeared so straight and simple when he had written to Eugenia, now, if he gave it serious thought, became insubstantial, a mere figment of unreality. When had he lived thus in other days? Vaguely he compared these days to the best of his war life; they, too, had been bare of remorse and hope,—they, too, had been, like these, empty, diaphanous, as if the fresh melancholy joy of the huntsman were suspended in the air.

He was thinking of such things as these during one endless twilight, seated on the quay of the lake waiting for Celestine. She came up behind him, and placing her hands over his eyes, recited two lines from Kipling:

"Two things greater than all things are,
The first is Love and the second, War."

"But, tell me," asked Filippo, without turning around, "did you ever manage to remember where you got those other four verses:

"'Ah, if ever you meet me again . . .' ?"

"I don't remember," she replied in English, after a pause. "I can't recollect."

The words, hardly murmured, issued from her lips like a delicate smoke that does not cloud the atmosphere.

CHAPTER VI

After her last dinner in May, Eugenia had moved to the Restori home. Signora Restori had helped her get out of her furnished apartment and the colonel had waited for her on the stair-landing, as one does with honoured guests. Now they treated her to egg-soups and heaping plates of meat such as are given to invalids who must be gorged, which the lady of the house cooked herself at a great expense; they did not remove their glance from her, and spoke ever so low, as if she were hovering between life and death or they were trying to cheer her up and console her for a bereavement.

So that Eugenia grew weary of her long, ungirdled gown of black taffeta with a white-and-black striped collar. It was all the more distasteful to her because it displayed her condition too plainly, and Signora Restori (who was "as sterile as Abraham's wife," and those were no longer the "days of miracles") would stand before her in astonishment two or three times during the day, exclaiming, as if in loving rebuke:

"My darling daughter! And not even the fourth month! What, in God's name, are you going to give birth to? The Antichrist?"

She would call in her husband as expert testimony.

"Amadeo. Just take a look, will you. That's the way, Eugenia. Side view. No, just a hair's breadth toward the chiffonier. Turn your face this way if you don't mind."

And since Eugenia, though she did not utter a word, would show reluctance, Signora Restori would say:

"What? Ashamed of us two poor old creatures?"

"She's as big as a mountain, eh, Medeo? She's growing from hour to hour."

But however much she might have liked to, Eugenia decided not to have another gown made, for it would cost a few hundred lire, and she did not wish to touch either Filippo's five thousand or the five hundred sent by her father, which she

had laid away against some unforeseen need. This black and white one, for the rest, was the most comfortable and gave her the least suffering. Now she wore her hair smooth, in two bands over her temples; the skin of her face, though not emaciated, had lost its transparency and its luminosity.

These exaggerated attentions and the pity behind the tender care held her soul in suspense and imparted a sensitivity forever in alarm. She had always felt a childish fear of the thunder and lightning, but for the past twenty years she had learned to moderate in some manner its outward manifestations. Now, on the contrary, one morning when three or four thunderclaps rolled with increasing rumble over the roofs, and the carriages and carts stopped to let down their covers and spread their oilcloth, she fell on her knees before the bed, and utterly possessed by terror, called upon Christ and all the saints,—she who, when she prayed, prayed in a manner all her own.

A few minutes later the sun pierced the cloud and dissipated it. Fifty kilometres beyond, upon the Lago Maggiore, lay the most beautiful morning that eyes had ever seen. One sensed a little darkness, perhaps, not far off on the plain, and two white, domed clouds were swelling in the west and seemed to rival, in jest, the majesty of the Alps, lending the greater relief to the blue that had spread all about. Anew there was only the sudden warmth of midsummer, and a keener, more sonorous buzzing of the flies.

But a tempest raged in Filippo's heart and an unconquerable desire for a quarrel possessed him. The day before he had waited for three hours amidst the brakes of the dell, lurking crouched like a smuggler watching for a favourable moment. This was the first time in five weeks that Celestine had been late. Returning to his room he found two lines: "Impossible to-day. Perhaps to-morrow, too. Will let you know very early to-morrow. Wait for message at the inn. C." But he had not had the patience to wait later than ten o'clock, even as, on the day before, he had lacked the courage to violate the agreement that forbade him to enter the villa without Celestine's previous permission. So he had dashed off at the regular

hour to the regular meeting-place where they exchanged their morning greetings. Now he stood with his head in his hands, gazing toward the rocks, and thinking that this was the last day. "Paradise is going to close." Either Celestine had fled from him mysteriously, leaving in secret, because she could not bear the tears of parting, and the pain of it all gave her a "shudder"; or else he himself, if he saw her again, would mistreat her and repel her, so as to close this episode brusquely and without weeping. For a moment it occurred to him that she might be ill. Inadmissible. She would have let him know. And it wasn't in her nature to fall ill. No, he was sure that he would never see her again. The next day, right in the evening, off he would be with his new bag on the way back. He could see far down, through the windows of the coach, the yellow trams of the suburb; a carriage came up the slope; he could smell the odour of the sun-heated asphalt; he pressed the big bell of the brown house-door with its two panels, like the good husband returning unexpectedly. Nothing would be changed, except that there were six, instead of ten, thousand lire in his wallet. But what? Could he really, in two or three hours, before the sun set behind the Pizzoni, annul those five weeks,—re-enter beneath the domestic roof and face his pregnant wife? At thought of this absurdity he was dumbfounded, as if some one had assured him that with a single jump he could land upon another planet.

Once or twice he struck his ear, shooing away an insect that was tickling him. The third time he turned around. It was Celestine, a couple of paces away, prodding him with the pliant tip of a shoot. Now, at last discovered, she whistled to him almost soundlessly through her lips, as one whistles to a caged canary inviting it to sing, and then amid an outburst of laughter, made as if to dash off like a nymph.

"What's up? What do you call this?" he shouted furiously, catching at the hem of her dress. "Why didn't you come yesterday?"

She freed herself; then she faced him squarely, with her hands upon her sides, shaking her entire bust:

"Eh, eh! Your Excellency believes that he is the sole and

absolute lord and master? Signora Lambert, however, has certain duties."

"What duties? What duty can make you leave me waiting here for three hours? Nobody would do it with a lackey!"

His anger incited her own, and emboldened her. She replied in evasive fashion, half singing her words:

"Signora Lambert had an important visit."

"What visit?"

"The Vice-President of the Inter-Allied Commission to His Majesty the King of Rumania, General Edouard Lambert, Commander of the Legion of Honour, Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown."

With the same invariably singing tone, speaking under her nose like the subaltern reporting to his superior, she told him in detail that the urgent telegram from Bucharest had been handed to her the day before as she was taking her coffee after luncheon, three-quarters of an hour before the minute scheduled by the time-table for the passing of the Orient Express through the Baveno station; so that she had scarcely had a couple of minutes in which to send him the two-line note, availing herself of the services of a guest who happened to be going to Stresa on an errand,—to don a *tailleur* and to rush breathless to the station. And she had had to chafe through every one of the seventy minutes that the train was late. She reported that the general was looking very well and was happy to be getting back to Paris, whither he was called to even higher commissions; that he was in an awful hurry, and that neither she, Celestine, nor Henri had been able to detain him more than an afternoon and a night. He wanted to be at the Ministry next morning at any cost, and for that very reason he had not taken the afternoon express which, between the frontier of Switzerland and the French boundary, lost about four or five hours and not infrequently arrived at Paris at noon. He had taken the direct train that arrived at Baveno around ten in the morning, where on the previous night he had assured himself of a bed.

"Satisfied?" she asked, somewhat less sarcastically, when she had concluded her report.

"And now?" asked Filippo.

"Now, the general, my husband, kindly orders me to return without delay to my residence, to inaugurate officially the after-war season at the Trocadero, and to sound the assembly for our children. I've told him that I need three or four days in which to pack, pay my bills, return the piano, sell my boat and motor, and so on and so forth. Of course, I threw in a few words that would enable me, day after to-morrow, to show him that I need a week, and after that week to telegraph him for five more days of final, definitive delay." All at once Filippo felt that he would have preferred never to see her again. "But your conduct, signore, makes me feel like changing my plans. And now let me be off, for my little imp is waiting for me. No kiss, for you haven't deserved it."

"Stay a while," he said, trying to command.

"By the way," resumed the woman, neither obeying nor disobeying him. "Do you know what a trick that imp, that little mountebank number four played on me last night?"

"What?"

"While we were at table he asked me: 'Mamma, why didn't you invite your Italian friend to-night?' "

"And what did you say?"

"I? Nothing."

"And he?"

"He,—without even raising his chin from the plate: 'Who is your Italian friend?' "

"And you?"

"I: 'Captain Rubè.' "

"And he?"

"He: 'Who is that?' "

"And you?"

"I: 'You must have forgotten him. You've left your memory in the hospitable city of Bucharest. You met Captain Rubè more than once in my salon. An Italian officer. The only Italian officer that I have among my friends. The fellow who uttered so many witty paradoxes in tribute to French civilisation. You recall him now, don't you?' "

"And he?"

"He: 'Hmm!' "

"And then?"

"And then he asked me: 'Where did you fish up this fellow? In the lake?' "

"And you?"

"I: 'I didn't fish him up at all. He was on vacation at Stresa, and while he was walking along the road he caught sight of me playing hide and seek in the garden with Henri, and walked in to visit me.' As you see, that was the truth."

"And nothing else?"

"Nothing else. Oh, yes; toward the end of the dinner he asked me: 'Did you invite him often to dinner?' "

"And you?"

"I turned to the governess and said to her: 'Signora, twice, I believe?' "

"And she?"

"She nodded yes. 'Yes, signora, twice.' Still the truth."

Their dialogue had lost all acridness. Between her teeth she held the shoot with which she had tickled her friend. He had resumed his seat upon the dense grass, with his knee gripped in his hands. Around his head he felt a zone of headache, and he could attribute this only to his disgust. The odour of herbous, watery shadows that rose from the dell yielded to the waves of the scent that came from the woman: impure, sharp, and heightened by the heat, as of fur and essence of sandal; it was as if her perfumed arm-pits were a trifle scorched by the sun. Now that he was somewhat calmer he could observe her. She had gone out, even that morning, with a white ostrich boa upon her arm and a gown of oil-green velvet that fairly dragged along, cut not very deep at the neck but very wide, so that the front and back, running even, met above the shoulders, making two sickles of slightly bronzed nudity. There certainly was nothing under her gown except a short black silk chemise, with lace straps that sometimes showed, and a pair of gauze stockings, held in place by emerald-clasped garters. Above all he could see, amidst a sun-beam that had pierced the leafy shadows, her face, in which the blue of her irises seemed to have overflowed into her sockets, and her

cheeks were a trifle drawn under the too shining cheek-bones, and her lips were pale, bitter, almost dry. Yes, this was the face she wore after the hours of love. Filippo saw all this and his nostrils were filled with that odour of precious down, as if the whole forest about him were tropical; it made his heart beat wildly.

"We'll see each other later, then," she said. "That adorable little spy is waiting for me."

But she did not stir, because this time she wanted it to be he who asked for the kiss.

"Listen . . ." said Filippo, and he coughed to clear his voice. "You . . . you have been with your husband?"

"My God! I have been with my husband from 3:51 yesterday to 9:30 this morning. Why, I've just been telling you all about it!"

"No, no. Were you with your husband . . . last night?"

"Oh, la, la. What a rude question! I forbid you."

"Why didn't you refuse him?"

"Are you crazy? What was I to tell him? That one of the Allied captains, an Italian, the only Italian among my friends, denied a French general any imperialistic rights over his own wife? Ha, ha, what a funny fellow!"

"And . . . you . . . say . . ."

She read his question in his turbid eyes.

"Not that. Not that. You're about to subject me to an indecent cross-examination. I forbid it. Fih!"

"You," insisted Filippo, in a voice that sounded all the more threatening for being so slow, "swore to me that I had taught you what love was."

"Yes, that's true. But how am I to blame if the lessons have not been lost upon me?"

She repented this impudent reply too late. The man had bounded up from the ground with a desire for blood such as he had never felt in battle. Dropping her boa she recoiled, her long arms extended helplessly until she found support against the trunk of a chestnut tree; with that assassin's face before her she considered herself lost.

But his fingers, which had been violent at the moment when

they dug into her shoulders near the neck, gradually lost strength as they descended along her half-naked bosom until his hands, having reached her hips, clung to her only with their feverish palms. The fulminating consciousness that he desired this woman irresistibly, precisely because two hours before she had been in the arms of another, rose from the darkest depths of his soul, empty of all remorse, as indifferent as the bubble that rises to the surface from the deeps. Passion had overpowered him completely. Becoming aware of the change, she laughed a curt, muffled laugh that seemed to come from her lap.

"Will you?" he whispered into her ear, drowning in the perfume that was shed by the woman he held.

"No, no, no, no . . ." and she laughed softly, in sobs, always in that strange, muffled voice. "Not now. Later. They're waiting for me. Before to-night. Be reasonable."

He tried to bend her, but she resisted him stoutly, drawing up as straight as a sword and moving him away.

"No, no," she repeated, more firmly, but polite. "I don't feel like it now."

Then he changed front, and holding back his breath he tried to look somewhat calmer.

"Then come, at least, for a half hour's ride in the boat. I give you my word that I won't touch you. Come. Yes? I beg you. You couldn't have the heart to leave me at such a moment. Be good to me. Don't be bad. You can't say no to me; you've made me suffer too much."

With her head she still said no, while he, grasping her by the hand, was already dragging her along, step by step. At last, having picked up the white boa with her other hand, she followed him.

They never embarked at the landing that faced the villa. That morning they did. She hoped that nobody saw her from the house, on the few metres of the road that separated the park from the garden on the lake; but Henri was near the gate.

"Mamma, mamma, are you going into the boat? Me, too. . . . The lady says that it'll soon be raining. Don't go."

"I'll be right back. I'll be right back. . . . In half an hour . . ." she said, turning around slightly without stopping.

The little boy, whimpering without tears, and without following her:

"Mamma, you promised to make me an airplane this morning."

"I'll be right back, I'll be right back," she repeated, as she disappeared. "You'll have the airplane before luncheon."

Filippo was still dragging her along by the hand, so as not to lose possession of her.

Certainly he was hoping for some incident that would compel the *Balzana da Quattro* to land at some distant point. He imagined some restaurant on the shore, with a pergola, under which Celestine would have to accept his invitation to luncheon; and a neat little room in some inn, where she would be no longer reluctant to follow him. But it was by pure accident that he forgot to refill the petrol tank. He spread the yellowish-brown curtain across the boat, for the sun was rather hot, and then removed his coat.

They made for the middle of the lake, and had straight before them the bay of Laveno. The boat left a shining, oily wake. When they had got some distance from the shore he began to kiss her upon the cheek, prying with his hands between her collar and her shoulder, so as to widen the opening at her neck.

"Dear friend," she said, in the gentle voice employed with excited persons to forestall a new outbreak, "you swore not to touch me. Behave, please."

"Let me see your bosom," he implored in a hoarse voice. "I won't touch you."

She, in order to appease and satisfy him:

"Sit down there opposite me. No, further away. At the prow. You must look, but no touching."

She unclasped a few hooks and with some effort drew her arms out of the short sleeves, and felt a little ashamed. The upper part of her gown, dropping together with the straps of her chemise, stopped at the high curve of her bosom. She

saw his pale and unsatisfied countenance; he looked ugly to her.

"I've become two different colours," she said, for the sake of saying something. "The sun has tanned me at the top."

The sun was coming out and going in. Other dome-topped clouds had appeared over the Lombardy mountains, and seemingly wished to join those in the west to take a silvery walk around the burning landscape.

"Dear friend, let's be going right back," said Celestine. "Don't make me return late."

"Yes. Immediately."

"Just look how black the sky is yonder," she said, after a few minutes, entreating him to turn back.

The sky was black over the plain. He did not wait to be asked a second time and turned the prow. They were upon the mirror of water between Intra and Laveno. But suddenly the motor stopped. Filippo had hardly stooped to examine what could have happened to it when immediately he recalled that he had left with a half-empty tank.

"We'll have to get busy!" he said.

They each seized a pair of oars.

"Which do you think we're nearest to?" he asked, in a voice that was too sonorous, "Intra or Laveno?"

"Why, surely, we're nearer to Intra."

They rowed toward Intra, but this time they did not chant "Hé, hop!" The lake was scarcely ruffled. Belgirate and all the mountains of Stresa were already in the midst of a downpour. But he looked neither at the water nor the mountains.

"Look," said Celestine, "how the colour of the water has changed. What would you call this hue?"

"The colour of a drowned man," he answered, ceasing to row for a moment. And he made the sign of a cross, half in boastful jest and half in earnest.

They could count the ramshackle houses of Intra one by one. They could make out the joinings of the glass cupola on the landing-place, which now, oppressed by the gloomy sky, did not glow with the reflected splendour of the sun. The waters were deserted.

"Within ten minutes," he said, with a hoarseness altogether different from his hoarseness of an hour before, "within ten minutes we'll be safe on land."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when they were enveloped by the swift cloud that emptied upon the boat in bucketfuls. This was the *piovasco* of which he had heard people talk. Fortunately, he thought, it lasts but a short time; and mentally again he made the sign of the cross. Not only the shore had been lost to view, but his very companion was seen through a thick mist, and then disappeared, as grey and hazy as a larva.

"Stop rowing!" he shouted. "You've lost the rhythm. It's more dangerous."

From moment to moment he expected to dash against the Intra wall. But when, after an eternity, he issued from the abyss of that cloud, he saw that in the darkness he had changed direction, and that now he was rowing at some distance from Intra, toward the north. Yet by some miracle he had managed to hug the Piedmontese coast. He looked landward to get his bearings, and saw a clump of huge eucalypti, with trunks as smooth and shining as nude statuary.

"The eucalyptus trees," he said. "We're near Ghiffa. Let's go to Ghiffa. We've never been there."

But he looked along the shore to see whether there were not some nearer landing place, for the wind was coming from the south and the waves were running higher. He was surprised by the coolness of the air and the metallic vibrations of sounds.

"Ghiffa," repeated Celestine. "I am in your hands."

She was cold, although she had the boa wound twice around her neck, and was soaked with the rain, which was still pouring down in torrents from the covering, because of the restless lake. She did not dare to go through the motions necessary to placing her bare arms back into her sleeves, fearing that she might upset the balance of the boat, which was full of water and was dancing. She drew herself tightly together so as to keep from shivering too much, and her face was overcast by shadows; her voice, now exceedingly thin, sounded as if it came from another

world. To keep her feet out of the water she held them high against the middle seat. Filippo, who was seated directly opposite, looked now with repugnance at her nakedness, and averted his glance. She saw this and thrust her feet ankle deep into the water to cover them. From time to time she inspected the life line of her left hand.

"Quit!" he cried to her in exasperation. "Quit that looking at your life line. Your life isn't going to be suddenly interrupted nor am I going to live and die in politics, as that fortune-teller of yours predicted. We've reached the shore! Better do something useful. Bail out the boat."

And he threw her a sponge, which struck her in the face. She obeyed as meekly as a child, and began to bail.

The wind was now swelling the covering, which fluttered like a sail. A huge wave swept by close to the boat, clouding the air with a whirling eddy of spray and sweeping along the lake like the dust on a highway. The boat was not capsized. A solitary thunderclap rolled with twice repeated reverberation in the west, tossed about by the echoes.

"Phili!" cried Celestine, in that maternal accent which it seemed impossible to hear again on that same day. And she continued to bail the hull.

He made no reply and he saw that her lips were quivering as if about to utter her *"Assez! Assez!"*

"Assez! Assez!" he repeated in his heart, and the two words merged into one, becoming *Assassin.* "Assassin! Why not? Didn't Eugenia call me that, too?"

But now he was safe. He had located the landing place,—a little beach among the willows.

"In five minutes," he announced, as he laboured. "Four minutes. Three minutes." And he rowed with a strength that he himself felt was superhuman.

"Phili," said Celestine, "you don't intend to drown me as the Sultans drown their unfaithful odalisks?"

A precipitous cloud descended from the crest of the mountain, and the shore was again shut out from view. Another wave passed.

In that instant a sinister thought had occurred to him.

"Here, here," he had said to himself, as he felt the swell of the wave lifting him, "here are the waters of my life moving at last, and how! I can't say any more that I'm stuck in a swamp."

This reminiscence shattered his strength. His knees trembled, his arms fell, an oar escaped him.

Impetuously Celestine moved to the left to clasp him.

"No, no," he was about to shout. "Don't be foolish. Better give me one of the oars that you've got near you."

But his voice stuck in his throat; he had time only to throw himself headlong and with all his might clamp his arms around the knees of the woman, who was now on the gunwale. The wind and the excessive weight on the left side of the boat had half overturned it, and her bust was over the side, with her head down in the water. As he rushed upon her to seize her by the arms and drag her back, the boat capsized entirely and striking him on the back sent him to the bottom.

He had not loosened his grip upon Celestine's knee, which he pressed tightly to his chest. As it hindered his movements somewhat, he let the leg go and clasped to his bosom her ankle. The other arm he flung about in an effort to reach the surface, and no sooner had he sucked in a breath of air than the weight dragged him down again. The waters rumbling in his ears repeated: "You learned to swim on Long Island."

He was filled with violence against the violence of the elements. There was no doubt about it. He was certainly very near to the shore, and the waves were thrusting him nearer and nearer. He was saved. They were saved. The chief thing was not to let go of Celestine, not to let her drown as the Sultans do in the Bosphorus with their unfaithful odalisks. A few minutes of artificial respiration would revive the victim.

An invisible obstacle impeded the movements of the body he was dragging. He had to let it go. Almost at the same moment he felt his chest bitten by the teeth of a reef. Rising to his feet he knew for certain that he was saved. The *Balzana da Quattro,* with its white keel like a mane in the wind, was adrift in the bouncing waves. Celestine was there, two paces

away, stretched out face downward upon the rocks. The waves kept washing over her and receding. Her gown and her chemise had slipped off over her head and were floating not far from the boat, swollen with the water. A slipper, her stockings, her emerald-clasped garters had been left on; her large coiffure was completely dishevelled.

Placing his two hollowed palms at the sides of his mouth in megaphone fashion, Filippo shouted:

"Help! Help!"

The air, freed of the rain, carried his cry afar.

The first to answer the call was a thin workman toiling on the farm nearby, which had been washed by the storm along the entire front of the lake. Rolling up his trousers he forded the short distance. He helped Filippo turn the woman over and lay her out beside the willows. Celestine had surely struck her face against a rock. Where but a few minutes before had been her nose and lips was now a hole filled with water and bleeding shreds of flesh.

The little beach, perhaps a kilometre distant from the countryside, belonged to a very old retired physician, Buonconti by name, who had withdrawn to that tiny island together with his wife, who was only a few years younger than he. The tiny cottage looked like a miniature of the villa that Celestine had hired. There was a very short beach, above the beach an orchard, then the road, and behind the road a tiny villa of the Swiss variety with a bit of garden in the rear.

Doctor Buonconti, who had been summoned just as he was finishing his luncheon, came down the unrailed stairs that led from orchard to beach as fast as his eighty years permitted. Though it had stopped raining, he carried an umbrella. Out of a pocket stuck a corner of a napkin, and he was plainly chewing his last morsel. He clumped to within about five paces of where Celestine was lying. Having gone that far he stopped, and with two fingers of his left hand he made the sign of the *requiem*, and went no farther.

Very soon the beach was thronged with men and women who came running from every direction and had a hard time

keeping the children away. But Filippo saw nobody and heard nothing. Until an officer in grey-green, grabbing him by the shoulder, asked:

"Did you kill her?"

He made no reply, but turned on his heel.

"What was her name?" asked the other officer, taking out a notebook.

"Celestine Lambert."

"Ah," observed the first," she was a Frenchie."

The aged Signora Buonconti appeared a few minutes later at the garden wall.

"Cover her, at least," she shouted, and ran with her hands at her eyes toward the house.

A yellowish beam glided down from the clouds and cast a full illumination upon the face of the drowned woman. Her members were covered with dirt. Her hair, erstwhile of a golden bronze, and the tassels that had adorned her splendid body, lay now flat, tarnished by the water, like decaying sea-weed cast up by the lake.

A peasant woman dressed in black ran up the stairs to meet Signora Buonconti and take from her hands a sheet and a rude woolen bed-cover.

The peasant woman, kneeling near the willows, covered the corpse with this shroud.

PART FOUR

CHAPTER I

When, without knowing how or why, Filippo had resumed the road in the direction of Intra, he heard a voice arise from the murmurs of the little crowd that was dispersing.

"They're taking him to headquarters."

These incomprehensible words struck him; he wondered what they might mean. As the two officers, who had followed a pace behind him down to the little beach, at that moment placed him between them, he understood that he was being taken to jail. He was not surprised; rather he thought that at any moment the handcuffs would be placed upon his wrists.

Up to this instant he had gone through everything mechanically. Perhaps never in his life had he had so long a spell of darkness in his consciousness. Mechanically he had climbed the stairs when some one had said to him, "Let's be moving." Mechanically he had entered the little house near the orchard, where Signora Buonconti, charitable but stern, in order not to have him in her own home had sent for underclothes and a greenish-black coat of her husband's in good condition, which Filippo might wear as his own were drying. He had dried himself, had left in a corner his white trousers and his white shoes—such as those used in tennis—, had removed from his trousers pocket the wallet that had been left there when he took off his coat as they embarked, had put on doctor Buonconti's checkered shirt, his socks of coarse cotton, his black shoes, his coat,—everything several sizes too big for him. From the pockets of the coat came the odour of rancid lozenges. The only recollection that clung to him out of all this confusion was this sensation of smell and the embarrassment he felt when, feeling the need of it, he could not find a handkerchief in the physician's pockets and did not care to ask his wife for one. Then he rummaged in the pockets of his abandoned trousers and took his own, as wet as it was. A single

thought had come to him, monotonous and without the impress of emotion: his lung, which for the past few months had been cured, was now preparing some surprise for him.

The news of the wreck spread among the river-folk in the twinkling of an eye. An engineer employed by the Adsum, who had met Rubè at Bovisa and knew nothing of his discharge, telephoned to headquarters at Milan, which in turn transmitted the news to lawyer Giacone. Giacone burst into a double exclamation of "Jesus! Jesus!" adjusted his expression effortlessly to the gravity of the matter, and rushed in a motor car to Eugenia's apartment; here, learning her new address, he made for Colonel Restori's home.

Naturally the version that he gave to Signora Rubè was more euphemistic than that which the Adsum had communicated to him over the telephone. He told her only that Filippo, while sailing on the Lago Maggiore during a storm, had been miraculously saved; that his companion, a Frenchwoman, had been drowned; and that Filippo was held at Pallanza pending investigation of the case. The Adsum employé had given a more coloured, impressive account. The eye-witnesses at Ghiffa and San Maurizio, as well as public opinion in Intra, emphasised a certain series of circumstances amongst which the victim's nudity and her stockings occupied a merely subordinate place. The wound that disfigured the face of the corpse could not have been better adapted to the purpose of maiming her beyond recognition. Her knees, especially the left, and her left ankle, showed signs of violence. Finally, the incomplete, reticent phrases, and more generally, the stubborn silence with which the man replied to the questions put to him concerning what had happened, and his own apathy, interrupted but once by a convulsive shudder, constituted, together with the preceding facts, a clear conjunction of circumstances which might well lead to the well-grounded suspicion that the tragedy upon the lake had been a more or less passionate crime, and that the squall had played only the part of an unnecessary accomplice. When Adolfo De Sonnaz learned all this, he simply uttered an "Ah!" but glared at his brother with the radiant countenance of one who knows men and does not err in judging

them. Then he resumed the explanation of a diagram of metal quotations.

The little that Giacone told, in less than fifty words, was heard by Eugenia almost without a tremor of her face, which, already pale, became as white as a sheet. She herself marvelled that there should come back to her mind certain words that she had read as a child in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "If you swoon, I'll kill you!" She did not swoon; mentally she assented to the kind and prudent words of her visitor. At the end she said that she entreated him to aid her husband. And, since, with a bow, he promised to leave for Pallanza the following morning, she asked him to keep her informed, possibly day by day, of everything, pitilessly, and to summon her thither as soon as he considered her presence "on the spot" necessary. At this point Giacone, without any intention of being indiscreet, and only out of professional duty, "much against his will," asked her what she knew or believed about her husband's life during the past five weeks. Eugenia told him about the secret departure at dawn of the 27th April, and all the rest; she informed him, too, that on the day previous she had received a letter marked Paris, but she had never believed in it and had never in any way been able to conceive the real state of affairs. These letters, if they could be of any service to him, she placed at his disposal. Perhaps, she added, Lieutenant Garlandi knew more about it. Accompanying him to the door, she managed, after swallowing her saliva with an effort, to thank him for what he was doing and would do, in her own name and in that of her unborn child.

Giacone's intervention was by no means superfluous. For several days he ran like a shuttle between Pallanza and Milan, where it was impossible for him to entrust his affairs to substitutes. Towards nightfall he would write a note to Eugenia, dispatching it to her by errand-boy. He excused himself for not calling in person; his business and the numerous annoyances connected with it pulled him by the hair in every direction. He had spent the morning at Pallanza, or at the scene of the accident; he was returning there the next day. Let her be calm. Before the end of the week, within two or three days

at the most, Filippo *ought* to be free; his innocence was above all suspicion.

He knew the presiding judge Sacerdote very well,—one of the most embittered and sophistical inquisitors that it had been his fortune to meet in his entire career. Between this magistrate and Filippo, from the very first moment, an exceptional contest had begun upon the outcome of which Giacone could exert only a very cautious and indirect influence. He certainly could not control Filippo's conduct, nor did he care to take advantage of the deference which the cavalier Sacerdote sincerely showed toward the celebrated lawyer to influence him. In this way, he feared, he would make the judge more obstinate than ever in his course and inflame that independent spirit of a crossed Bastian. Later Giacone said that he had limited himself to putting a tiny flea into the ear of the eminent jurist. The best he did was to appreciate, with his own eyes and reasoning, all the particulars of what had happened and to examine everything, from Celestine's corpse to the *Balzana da Quattro* and the reefs before the Buoncontis' little villa. As he was convinced of Filippo's innocence, he infused this conviction, by the aid of documentary evidence, into his colleagues at Intra and Pallanza and into numerous acquaintances that he had on the lake, and bestirred himself to concentrating the Vox Populi, which, as he saw it, would shatter the rising edifice of accusation and force the authorities to release the suspect.

Rubè had no objection to being convicted of manslaughter, even if he were sent to the penitentiary. The idea of regaining his liberty held no attractions for him. To come back to his wife, who hardly could be expected to have any further interest in him; to accept the commiseration of his neighbours, which would be burdensome enough if expressed in words, and downright crushing if expressed in a sidewise glance; to recount the circumstances of the misfortune to his parents-in-law, his colleagues, his mother and sisters, or keep them silent; to recommence his profession, detecting in the eyes of his perplexed clients mistrust of a lawyer marked by so tragic a fate; to seek a living that should not taste of charity; to be

cradling, perhaps within five months or little more, his own child in the same arms that had atrociously clasped a corpse beneath the water:—these were all imaginings that did not appear horrible to him only because they seemed utterly absurd, dispassionately extracted from a colourless ratiocination, as insubstantial as are dreams that we know to be dreams and in which we experience neither pleasure nor fear. It would have seemed to him less fantastic to imagine a road back to the past, some miracle that should restore Celestine to life and rescind all that had happened after the evening of the 26th of April. It was clear that fate, for so long invoked, had finally given him a rendezvous on the reefs below Ghiffa, and that the results of that colloquy were not such as admit of revision. Certain words that he had spoken to Celestine in an hour of immobile joy modulated by the evening zephyrs:—"My life is this; the future will be only a survival"—now reappeared to him as if visibly carved in black upon a bronze portal. He thought at times of the concatenation of events, from the quarrel in the dell to the wreck of the boat, with that objective satisfaction aroused by the inevitable.

He knew that he was too rational to go mad; as for dying by his own hand, above all he knew that he was too unlucky. As the squall had capsized the boat at just such a point for Celestine to die and him to be cast upon the beach, ironically surviving all reasons for living, so it was likely that, even did he summon the courage to commit suicide, his hand would tremble or the bullet would deviate just enough to inflict an ignoble, painful wound and win him the derision that rewards feigned suicides.

In this desperation that he himself judged all the less remediable because it was attended with no fever,—clear, without pretence, without poignant grief,—the prospect of conviction, or at least of a long precautionary imprisonment and a drawn-out trial, presented nothing alarming. Imprisonment in a certain manner was equivalent to what in other days he had hoped military service and war would be: an exemption by superior order from the obligation of making decisions in daily

life, a social solution of those problems which the individual cannot confront. Better still, it resembled the deep, torpid illness that the unfortunate invokes when he finds himself caught in an inextricable crisis,—the kindly typhus that gradually restores him to nature and society, which renders him as inert and inept as when he lay in his mother's womb, and absolves him from the duty of living without on that account putting him to death, or, at least, letting him feel the pangs of death. He understood that, whether he were condemned unjustly or subjected to a persecution, which according to human law, was undeserved, a beneficent transmutation of values would take place in his consciousness. He had been a debtor; he became a creditor. He had been a criminal; he became a victim. At the end of his long segregation, at the end of meditations prolonged through months and years, he glimpsed a flash of that beatitude which he could not imagine, knowing it only by name: redemption, purification, peace; this he felt as one who divines a gleam of light at the end of a long, long subterranean passage. Finally, he did not conceal from himself the fact that pity, sympathy for the man who was a victim of a legal error, would smooth the path of his return to society,—a return which at the present was not even conceivable.

But because he accepted this iniquity, writing up in his heart, on the asset side, the profitable results that would accrue from it, he needed some one to impose it upon him with an act of command. Some one ought to enter his hired cell and wave before his eyes a formal document with a few grains of violet dust still adhering to the folds, and that document ought to read: "The said Rubè Filippo, son of the late Demetrio Rubè, is formally accused of murder." Or: "He is condemned to so many years and so many months of imprisonment, according to articles such and such." He would have answered: "Very well." Once he surprised himself with the question: "How is it that the State, which in so many instances wields a superhuman power, is in certain others as weak as a child? The State decides upon war to preserve the European balance; it summons a citizen and commands him: 'March! You must become a homicide.' Very well, if you can command

a man to become a homicide, why can't it command, in defence of moral balance, that another *should have been* an assassin?"

Instead, cavalier Sacerdote insisted that Filippo should confess to the crime. He had constructed in his mind an entire plan, simple and harmonious, to explain the tragedy upon the lake, and had become enamoured of its architecture. All it needed was that the protagonist, as obedient as the labourer to the architect, should rear it stone by stone, in all reality. According to him, Filippo had violently opposed his mistress's wish to return to her family, and had forced her to follow him upon the lake, under the pretext of a last sentimental sail together, with the set purpose of subjecting her to his will, of threatening her, and, if need be, of killing her. Whether this last purpose were or were not conscious from the start, the magistrate still left in the dark. Nor could he answer precisely the question whether the motive of the crime had been solely passional, or whether this disoriented man,—a demobilised captain, a shyster lawyer without clients, a discharged employé—had wished to assure himself by force of this woman who had, through fatal caprice, up to now maintained him. Upon this and other obscure points the second phase of the examination would shed more light. What was beyond cavil was that the two had struggled for a long time; that the man, profiting by the solitude of the lake during that season, when few foreigners were about, and during that dark hour, had torn off the woman's clothes, thinking that, amidst this tumult of the senses and the very terror that this unbridled audacity must have inspired in her amidst the raging elements, he could extort from her an oath to disobey her husband; and finally, blinded by her repulses, he had discharged the revolver in her face.

But here the mist had deceived him as to distance, and finding at his feet the corpse which he thought he had cast to the bottom of the waters, or hearing the voice of people as he was making for the shore with the intention of taking a rock and tying it around the neck of the murdered woman, or finally, having realised that it was impossible to set aright the boat that he had abandoned in a difficult spot, there was

nothing left but to pretend that they had met with an accident. This, for the rest, was so cleverly accomplished as to merit a place of honour in the annals of celebrated crimes. The chief thing now was to fish out that revolver. "It's there," he said to the most experienced of officers. "It's there,—that revolver, at the bottom of the lake. I can see it with my eyes. It's like multiplication, with the product at the bottom of the column containing the factors. It's all a matter of locating it." This arraignment, in which the errors flew as thick as hail, appealed to him as a masterpiece of investigation that put Poe's *Gold Bug* in the shade. So that he was hurt, as by a grave insult, by the way Giacone ("that most excellent lawyer, that millionaire gentleman!"), who had invited him to luncheon at the Hotel Eden and listened to his private opinions, shook his head in disbelief. And there was that excessive ease with which Giacone permitted himself paradoxes of this type: "When a delinquent is intent upon effecting the disappearance of a woman on a lake, shooting a revolver into her face and tearing off his victim's clothes are operations de luxe, while a rock around her neck or something of the sort is an instrument of primary necessity." . . . "Yes, my dear fellow," objected the judge, piqued, "but you are forgetting the teachings of our positive criminology upon the illogicality of delinquents."

"Confess," he said magnanimously to Filippo. "Confess. Confession is a sacred institution of all religions, and not only of the Catholic, as folks wrongly suppose. The benefits that derive from it may be deduced from a knowledge of the human heart. Confession! Confession purifies guilt, it sweetens expiation, it softens the soul of the jury. The very majesty of the law bows before the repentant criminal who confesses."

These words, and the tones in which Sacerdote pronounced them, seemed to Filippo unclean. "This fellow," he said to himself, "is worse than I. I," he went on explaining to himself with a distinction that he did not consider too subtle, "am an infamous wretch, an ill-starred victim; but this fellow is a cheat who does evil, as I have never done it, with the deliberate purpose of accumulating a fortune at the cost of other persons' misfortune." He hated the judge, when that pompous worthy,

beginning the interrogatory, sharpened his glance with a visibly mechanical effort of the will, as if his pupil were a pencil whose point needed sharpening with a pen-knife,—and when, as he listened, he held one finger firmly in a nostril, and when, choosing a new stroke against a parry, he would scrape his thick beard, which was as shining black as shoe polish, as if he had the truth hidden there like a louse among the hairs. As Filippo, in those days, did not shave, and his eyes shone with anger like live coals, in the back of his hollow, bristly face, the judge had an additional reason to consider that criminal countenance with confidence. "If he could, he'd kill me," was his thought. And he took pleasure in it. He thought he was playing at cat and mouse with Filippo, and that at the right moment he would grasp him irremissively in his claws. Yet it was Filippo who played the cat in this game.

And he, no sooner did he see that the inquisitor was about to lose the game, would mix up the cards anew and deceive him with stammering reticence, with astute silence and futile contradictions, upon which the judge's hope fed as dying embers upon an unexpected gust. Thus Filippo exchanged cruelty for cruelty, and even drew things out as long as he could because he was at a loss what to do if at any moment they should set him down free and alone, face to face with himself, upon the Pallanza landing place. Several times he heard, almost formed within his bosom, the words: "Well, you are right. I killed her. I confess." But he could not bring them to his lips. At such moments he felt capable of enduring every sort of torture, but not that of his mind, and it seemed a mental agony to witness the triumph of cavalier Sacerdote. Soon the contest between them assumed, for him, the character of a treacherous rivalry, a mad legal tournament. He must at all costs checkmate his lawyer adversary, with all due subtlety and savoury delays; the case in itself mattered little, as did the interests of the client, even though that client were himself. So that of the two the judge was certainly more excited than the judged.

The twenty-four hours most favourable to the claims of the zealous functionary were those immediately following the ca-

tastrophe. Mademoiselle Hardouin, the governess, dishevelled, but not entirely without charm, and sobbing at such regular intervals that the spectator was impressed with the benefits of a year's attendance at a school for public speaking, was axiomatic in establishing a connection between the wretched end of her "poor mistress" and the flying visit of the general with his orders to pack up at once. As to Filippo, from the very first day that he had turned up at the Villa, she had considered him a "low-down sort,"—an evil fellow capable of the most desperate actions, and the face that he had that morning, when he dragged her poor mistress by the hand to the quay, threatened a worse storm than the heavens.

Investigation at the Stresa inn yielded positive results as well. The proprietress clapped one palm against the other, raising her clasped hands to the height of her forehead, and swore and swore again that she had taken the two for man and wife, and that she had believed the wife to have accepted the hospitality of a friend at some villa, while her husband preferred to remain at his ease in the inn; she wailed at the bad reputation which would now becloud her house—a small place, but one of excellent repute—where such shameful things as this had never occurred. What most impressed the judge, however, was the double discovery of the false name Burè, and of the six thousand lire packed away in Filippo's bag, while he had taken with him in his pocket only three hundred. The tale of a lucky night at the gambling house and of the fortuitous meeting with Celestine, of which Filippo unwittingly stressed the least likely circumstances, struck against the wall of a massive, virile incredulousness. The tale of the lucky win was particularly hard for the magistrate to credit.

"It seems impossible," he said, "that a man as intelligent as you should not have been able to invent anything more plausible. Trey in the lottery! Trey in the lottery!"

Then the judge's fortune began to decline. Garlandi's deposition concerning the night of gambling arrived. In the café conversations one might discern subversive, disruptive effects of the propaganda spread by Giacone; the autopsy seemed to confirm Filippo's version; the revolver refused to

come to the surface. Instead, General Lambert had come flying back from Paris, with a single thought in his mind: that there was plenty of time in a whole life to be unhappy, but that there were only a few days or a few hours in which he might remedy the remediable and prevent his name and that of his children from being sullied. He was truly military in his promptness of conception and execution. He discharged mademoiselle Hardouin on the spot, silencing her with a gift that was as sizeable as a dowry, and entrusting her, as her last service, with the return of Henri to Paris; they told the little boy that his sick mother would rejoin him within a few days, together with papa; then the general saw to the settling of all accounts at the villa and to the repatriation of Celestine's body; he also used high political influence to see to it that the newspaper reports were not sensational.

Confronted with Filippo, he did not even look at him, but kept talking, and very little, to the judge. As Filippo strangely persisted in telling how it happened that, as "Madame Lambert" was drowning, she lost her clothes, he replied, incisively:

"I did not ask this gentleman for details as to my wife's toilette."

The two interviews that he had with the judge were somewhat stormy. The judge was bent upon starting "a great trial of international proportions," while the general was eager to effect just the contrary.

The following day Sacerdote was in a mood as black as his beard, and abandoning the *voi* with which he had been addressing his adversary, he resumed the *lei*. But he did not renounce his final attempt at force.

"See here," he said, in his drawling voice, "see here. The truth has come to light."

And at this juncture, unrolling from a bundle a black silk chemise, and amplifying his voice that it might blow like the trumpets of the last judgment:

"Here," he shouted, "is the truth come to light. What is this rent at the breast, if not the undeniable proof of a struggle? Do you mean to say it was the reef? The rocks, eh?"

As Filippo could not or did not wish to answer, lowering

his eyes with a shudder, a spark lighted in the magistrate's glance.

But no other sparks glowed there. That afternoon a higher-placed colleague of his, whom he detested and feared, said as he eyed him above the rims of his glasses:

"You're on the wrong track, do you know it?"

Whereupon ambition yielded to the panicky fear of cutting a lamentable figure. All the more so since, in this sort of thing, he had never met with much success. So that Filippo was acquitted. Cavalier Sacerdote came to wish him well.

"I congratulate you. Now it is most clearly proved that you are innocent. I congratulate you. I wish you the best of luck. You have suffered a misfortune; I only did my duty: a harsh, unpleasant, irksome duty. I hope that we shall be friends."

And Filippo did not have the presence of mind to keep his hands in his pocket. He clasped the judge's hands.

Giacone led him forth from prison; he had already telephoned to his office to have Eugenia notified of Filippo's imminent release, advising her to await him at Milan. Giacone, indeed, had forgotten nothing, and on the very first day he had telegraphed to Signora Giulia Rubè at Calinni that her son, having escaped a storm on the lake, was safe and sound and would shortly greet her. He referred briefly, in a special-delivery letter, to the death of Madame Lambert, concluding that all suspicion of Filippo would be dissipated in a few days. The telegram had stirred an exchange of anxious, bewildered questions between the mother and her unmarried daughter. "Then why didn't he telegraph himself?" . . . . "And who can tell what really happened to him?" And "There's not even an address given in the telegram." And "Did he have to take up sailing after the war?"

The reading of the letter, which arrived after the news in the papers had begun to spread through the district, was followed by howls and plaints and a precipitous dash to the windows, to close them and not let the neighbours hear. "What a shame!" moaned Sofia. "We're on everybody's tongue. Our name, that was always so highly honoured!

No Rubè ever had anything to do with the courts!" And the mother: "Happy Demetrio that he died five years ago, before living to see this. My son! My unfortunate son! Your mother warned you not to waste yourself on foreign women." Lucietta joined the chorus of tears, uttering not a word, and her husband, the Vice-prætor, went around twirling his moustache, unable to discover consolation for the women.

Now that Filippo was safe, Giacone saw to the publication of a leading news feature in ten-point italics, in the columns of the weekly, *Specchio del Verbano*, and purchased fifty copies to send around.

"Lawyer Rubè, who, consequent upon the tragic incident of the past Tuesday was held by the authorities, has been released. Not only has his complete innocence been established by the results of the investigation, but, despite Rubè's grievous modesty, the superhuman efforts which he made to save his unhappy companion during the fatal hour have been reconstructed point by point. Upon our very lake, within sight of the picturesque villa of San Maurizio, whose name, in the recollections of our renowned lawyer, will remain linked to a sad memory, he gave proof of that heroic abandon which, during the course of the past war, won him the silver medal. A special tribute is paid to the most excellent cavalier Sacerdote, to whose scrupulous investigation, guided by an acumen that was impartiality itself, we owe the certainty that the lamented end of the highly distinguished Madame Lambert was the exclusive work of the elements."

"Fine," thought Filippo the next morning as he read the newspaper. "Now I'll be nominated for the medal for civil valour."

It was Pentecost morning. The night before it had been too late to think of leaving. Even Giacone had slept at a Pallanza inn. Now there was a great ringing of bells from the coast to the mountains.

Filippo felt that he was staggering along the road like a sick man who has been allowed to get out of bed too soon, and that doubtless they would put him at once back to bed.

So that he was surprised as if by an electric shock when Giacone, putting his hand upon his shoulder, said:

"Well, then, my dear friend, so we're going back to Milan? Your wife has been notified and . . . she's certainly expecting you."

The other man turned his head without moving his chest, and in a low voice that was almost filled with anger, retorted:

"What? Am I not at liberty? Are you arresting me for the second time? Are you transferring me to Milan? Hasn't society rejected me even as a criminal? Let me go."

And he shook himself free of the hand that the other had weakly placed upon his shoulder. It seemed that this having been the chief figure in a terrible event conferred upon him every right, not excluding that of ingratitude. Giacone did not rebel, but continued to walk along the shore at his side.

Now Filippo realised that he had gone too far, and he explained himself more clearly:

"Really, how do you expect me to set foot again in Milan, right after what has happened? Let me catch my breath. A few days, a week."

"Quite so. Quite so," replied Giacone, pensively.

And indeed, he thought, if he were to take Filippo back to Milan in his custody, he would in all likelihood have to act as intermediary and witness of the meeting scene between husband and wife. And Lalla was already slightly jealous. Perhaps he ought to take Filippo back into the office with him, and help him start life all over again. These were thorny, difficult matters.

He was determined not to accept any fee or reimbursement. These were services that were exchanged between colleagues whenever possible. But there was a limit to every sacrifice.

"My dear friend," he resumed, "you really ought to spend a few days with your mother."

"Yes," replied Filippo, "that's just what I was thinking about."

They went together to the telegraph office to write out the telegram. It was very laconic: "Will arrive some time next week."

"Rather . . ." began Filippo, hesitating.

He wished to ask another favour of Giacone; and thus he willingly restored him once more to friendship. He did not dare to appear again at Stresa. He entreated Giacone, therefore, to go to the inn, with a letter of authorisation from him, to pay up his debts, gather the few effects of his that were left, and pack them into his bag.

They boarded the steamer. At Stresa Giacone landed, while Rubè, though it was a very warm day, waited for him in the salon below deck. Then they disembarked together at Laveno. Giacone continued to Milan; Rubè took the train for Novara.

"Pleasant journey. Good luck. See each other soon. *Sursum corda,*" said Giacone to him by way of good-bye. Then, with a slight laugh, he added, "And be sure to take a shave."

This Filippo did at Novara, taking advantage of a long wait between trains. He had his chin, his lip, and his cheeks shaved, leaving certain black temple-whiskers that cast coppery reflections; he had never affected this style, and they lent his face an old, sinister appearance. Between Novara and Alessandria he shut himself into his compartment and dropped on to the road, in the tiniest shreds, the visiting cards and any other printed matter that might lead to his recognition, with the exception of a copy of the *Specchio del Verbano,* which he retained in his pocket. At Alessandria he lost connections. He took a room in a hotel opposite the station, registering as Filippo Morello, which was his mother's cognomen, for the other fictitious name, Burè, seemed to have become known everywhere.

He spent the following day in a sort of lethargy. He went out only for a half hour and bought, for no clear reason that he could assign, a revolver. That night he boarded the train for Rome.

Supposing that a bullet from a machine gun or any other firearms possesses consciousness, it thinks of nothing during its trajectory, and recovers its senses only at the shock of striking its target. To such an extraordinary projectile Filippo compared himself during the journey. He thought of nothing.

He postponed all considerations until he should have reached his goal, which was Rome, at the top of a long hilly street in the remotest section of the Trastevere, cluttered with ragamuffins.

At Rome, too, he registered at the hotel that seemed least patronised among those in the vicinity of the station, under his new name, Morello. He went thither directly, without shunning the light of the sun, with his porter in front of him; he tried to look straight ahead, so as neither to see nor be seen. A shudder ran over him as he imagined that he recognised Clotilde Taramanna close by; she had grown perhaps too stout, and he hastened his step. He had his meals brought to his room, and for a half hour without interruption he drummed with his fingers upon the window panes. Towards evening he went out, after the cries of the swallows had grown rarer and more distant.

He recollected exactly the address of Father Mariani, the friend of the Montis, and knew his habits. But he chose a round-about way, up along the walls of the Villa Borghese and along the right of the Tiber's banks, so that he arrived after nightfall. He asked the janitress, pro forma:

"Is Father Mariani at home?"

"I don't believe so," she replied, with her hands folded across her huge stomach. "Ever since the Orphanage of San Giuseppe was established he comes home late. But he can't be long. However, if you'd like to try . . . The house is so big, and I can't stand watching everybody that comes in or goes out."

He went up three floors to room eleven, and pulled the bell.

"He hasn't returned yet," said the servant. "If you want to wait for him inside. . . ." But she eyed him suspiciously.

"No matter," answered Filippo, and began to descend the stairs.

"What shall I tell him?" asked the woman, reassured.

He made no reply, and waited at the lower landing. When a lodger would come up, Filippo would very softly make his way down, afterward climbing up again. He called to mind Marco Berti and their meeting upon the stair-landing in Paris.

Then came Father Mariani's turn. As he climbed the long, steep staircases he puffed a little.

"Father Mariani," called Filippo, almost voiceless.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, recoiling against the wall. The light was weak.

"Don't you recognise me?"

"Ah! Lawyer Rubè! I'd never know you. Were you looking for me? Fine, fine. Come right in."

And he extended his hand, in which a brief shudder was just subsiding.

He gave him a seat in his study, making room for him in an armchair from which he took a pile of books that he placed flat upon the floor. There were volumes in every corner and upon every piece of furniture. He pulled the little chain of the incandescent gaslight so as to have more light; and as he did so, one caught a glimpse of his not very cleanly hands.

"Excuse me for just a moment," he said, and ran into the adjoining room.

Filippo could hear that he was pouring water from a pitcher and roughly soaping his hands.

"A man can never get through with those blessed little children, and he comes back to his house at all sorts of hours, as dirty as if he'd spent a day in the country. I'll be in directly. Annarosa, another pitcher."

He washed.

"Here I am, my dear lawyer Rubè. I recall our interesting debates at the Rustica." And for a moment he become melancholy. "Good old times! Have you been to see poor Federico? No? Make yourself comfortable, quite at home. I'm in no hurry, you see. I just had a bite at the Orphanage. Annarosa, bring in two beakers of *rossoli*. Come now, let's hear all about you. It's years since I've seen you. I'm really pleased that you've come to visit me. Let's hear the good word, now."

CHAPTER II

"I," said Filippo, who, without replying, had spread out a copy of the *Specchio del Verbano* before the priest's eyes and followed his glance from the first line to the last, "I am a murderer."

Father Mariani's face, the fat of which was overflowing from an oval that had doubtless been handsome in his youth, and which was always heated and too florid, blanched to a pallor over which the greenish light of the gas cast a livid hue. Filippo saw the change but was not discouraged.

"The papers," he went on, coldly, as if from the very beginning he had been recounting matters that had no direct relation to himself, "the people, and even the judge say that I bore myself like a hero, and they've all but nominated me for the medal awarded for civil valour. Even better than a hero: they say I'm innocent. Innocent! What a great word! And how many million times more it's worth than the word hero! All the heroic acts of the world, gathered, pressed, and distilled into a single chemist's retort would not yield a product worth a single drop of innocence. The presiding judge clasped my hand and wished me good luck. Can a murderer have good luck? Hero, lucky fellow, innocent even. Eh, eh, I'm a murderer."

His listener had regained self-possession.

"Are you speaking to me under the seal of confession? Then speak lower."

And he closed the door tight.

"Not exactly seal of confession," clarified Filippo. "I am neither an observer nor a believer. Ever since my earliest youth I scoffed at all superstitions, and I held out successfully against my mother, who wanted to have me confirmed. With the years I became more tolerant, but not through progress of faith; rather, progress of scepticism. It did not seem strange

to me, then, that since men believe in so many fables, some among them should swallow the fiction of the holy communion. Pardon me if I offend you; I must speak frankly. So that I never came near the sacraments nor did I believe in anything, except, yes, perhaps,—the law of civil life, and, certainly, the law of honour. It is true that at times in church I grew tender, especially once at Paris, together with the woman whom I later killed. But where haven't I grown tender? These were all futile agitations, physiological vents, matters of the skin rather than of the heart. Ah, if I had ever been capable of being genuinely moved, I shouldn't be here now."

All this was uttered with somewhat insolent preciseness, and not without sarcastic sneers.

"See here, Signor Rubè," said Mariani, his fingers trembling slightly, "you haven't come here to tempt a humble servant of the Lord?"

"God forbid. If, indeed, I may be permitted to name Him. I am speaking the pure truth. The justice of man absolves me, releases me, declares me innocent! Whereupon I ask whether there exists a justice of God, which specifies my crime, indicates my punishment, and reveals me a glimpse of purification. My acquaintance among the ecclesiastical world is not very extensive. I remembered Father Mariani, who had a reputation, and deserved it, for being a pious man with a modern mind. 'Now,' said I to myself, 'if Father Mariani will hear me out, understand me, mete out punishment and hope, if he will show me the justice of God, very well. If not, off I go, like a capsized boat, adrift. It's a desperate experiment, a wager, a final bet coming as the climax of a night's gambling.' "

"What?" exclaimed the priest meekly. "You, betting against Providence! Playing against Providence, and placing everything on a single card!"

He had naturally abandoned the *lei* of social usage for the *voi* of the confessional. Filippo observed to himself that this was exactly the contrary to what had happened to him with the presiding judge.

"Your choice," resumed Mariani, interrupting his rebuke, "dismays rather than exalts me. It may well be that I am

unworthy of the charitable office for which you have come to me, and that, instead, some one else will succeed in that task, —perhaps your own conscience, on some day of grace."

"Does this mean Father Mariani rejects me?"

"I do not reject you. I am listening. Speak more calmly. Speak."

"I," began Filippo, "I killed Madame Lambert in two different ways: in intention and in fact. And here are the facts."

With scrupulous objectivity he recounted the story in every detail, touching, whenever it seemed needful, upon his relations with Eugenia and even with her family, and upon the courage, the "heroism" that he had conquered by sheer force during the war, as well as upon his first meeting with Celestine at Paris, and the second between Stresa and Baveno. Then he went at length into the circumstances of the catastrophe, but pausing every once in so often to add that this was the truth as it might appear to the justice of man and to Judge Sacerdote.

"The real truth is different. First of all, if I hadn't been a wretched coward, despite all the heroic masks and the silver medals, I should never have allowed myself to be superstitiously frightened by the words of that innocent woman, nor should I have let the oar drop out of the lock. In the second place, Celestine knew how to swim, though through fear of spoiling her coiffure she had never done any swimming under water. But if I, instead of throwing myself upon her, had ballasted her on the other side, and let her slide into the water, following her at once and giving her a hand, she would have been saved; she would have been saved. No: down I went with my hands, my arms, my chin upon those poor legs; tight, clasping the gunwale, shining, seeming to ask me to pull them up, when in reality they were asking me to let them go. Just think of it! See it with your own eyes! Horrible! She falls down into the water, and her dress and chemise wind around her head and stop her breath even worse than the water. With her arms and her nails—for she's strong—she tries to extricate herself; she tears her chemise and I fall upon her, with all my weight and the weight of the boat on me, and she regains her breath, when I clamp her knee, and when her knee slips out of

my grasp I grab her like a vise around the ankle in an implacable grasp! Now she no longer breathes, but there's a chance for me to resuscitate her, and I smash her, like . . . like . . . like a rotten egg against the rocks, and I drag her onto dry land, dead, faceless, naked, naked with her green stockings and her bejewelled garters,—naked with her stockings on, just like a prostitute. . . . Oh-h!"

He broke into a loud, piercing lamentation, not of pity, but of rage against himself and destiny.

"*Requiescat in pace,*" muttered the priest between his lips, and he crossed himself.

But he sighed. And he placed a kindly hand upon his visitor's shoulder. Filippo, however, who did not like the touch of priests, instinctively shrank away.

"Then," said Mariani, stepping back a short distance, "you did not commit murder. You committed an error. Involuntarily you contributed to the death of a human being. That's if what you say is precisely so, and your imagination hasn't deceived you. You're not a murderer."

"No! No!" cried Filippo vehemently in rebuttal. "I tell you, my heart should have spoken to me, should have given me the right counsel; it should have told me what to do and what not to do, as it tells a mother when her child is in danger at a fire, and when even a poor idiotic woman becomes a genius; while I, that day, became an idiot and caused her death. If I had ever had a heart, if I were not a condemned wretch, she would not have died. She should not."

"There, that's just what you are!" interrupted Mariani, who was unconsciously offended by Filippo's shrinking of a few minutes before. But at once he mastered himself. "It is not so much your personal fault as it is the fault of society, of the times. You're all hunters of fortune. You bewail your heart and your lost faith because you imagine that they will ward off misfortune, that God will perform His miracles at need. Idolatry! You would all go into the Theban desert like St. Anthony if you were assured earthly paradise as recompense. But God has not promised felicity upon earth, and His promises have this tremendous thing about them,—you can't touch them

with your hand. What is it you say? That if you had been a believer, a man of heart, Celestine Lambert, Madame Lambert would not have drowned? That's a sacrilege."

"I don't say that," corrected the other in a frigid voice. "I only say that during those moments I desired, violently, that Madame Lambert should not die; for I didn't want to die myself, nor did I want any responsibility upon my shoulders, a scandal,—Lord knows what—, a remorse, a tragedy. It was not that I wanted her to live, but I didn't want her to die. For my sake, not for hers. That makes matters different, you'll agree. That's why I drowned her like a dog. If I had thought of her, I'd have let her drop into the water, and she would have been saved. Instead, I thought only of myself, and couldn't stand to see her disappear from the boat, so I seized her, and thus killed her. Do you understand?"

The conciseness of his self-accusation appalled the priest.

"You," he began, after a pause, "are a sinner. And you have been punished, terribly punished for your sins. But you are not a murderer."

"I am. I am. And if facts didn't prove me one, intentions would. And it's intentions that count."

"What intentions? What do you mean?"

"I mean that, before stepping into the boat, when Celestine joined me at the dell which we called our secret garden, even then I was a prey to two simultaneous feelings. That's if you can have, understand, two feelings at a time, like two flames in the same fire. One was a vertiginous desire,—no, not a desire, a necessity,—to possess that woman. My head went empty. All my weight concentrated around my loins. Now notice, I don't say that I wanted her despite her belonging to another; I wanted her precisely because she had just come from another and was still warm from his embrace. Such a desire can be seen with your eyes; it's a scarlet red. Now, at the same time that I desired her, I wanted to kill her, too. That was the first time in my life that I wanted to kill anybody. No, not exactly. When my health was much worse, I had thought of killing myself, but that was a mere inner gossiping, not a very serious matter. This time it was much more. I

saw red with both my eyes. I felt like a rock that was in a sling, and somebody was behind, without the rock knowing it, holding the sling and shooting the rock forth. Celestine offered no resistance to my will to slay; she did resist, however, my will to enjoy. That's what fanned my flames. And, he concluded, pointing a finger at his forehead, "I, when I forced Celestine to come with me into the boat, didn't know just what I wanted. But I did want to throw some fuel into the flames that had been fanned and now were roaring."

"Those are sad sins of thought. But they do not constitute crime. In fact, your very remorse is already the beginning of expiation. Those are dark, tempestuous passions."

"Do you see? Do you see? You've spoken the right word. Dark. Tempestuous. And the storm didn't descend from heaven. It broke out in my own heart."

"Oh! But you are trying to batter down the gates to heaven with your closed fist. You attribute to it magic, satanic faculties. So it was you who brewed the tempest in the skies and the squall upon the lake! In the very belief that you are humbling yourself, you arrogate unto yourself superhuman powers. Out of a sin of the thought,—a blasphemous, dark sin, I'll grant you, you have made a consummate crime."

He struck his palms together.

"What?" asked Filippo in amazement, "is there a genuine difference between a sin of the thoughts and the action itself, except that the one is not seen and the other is? What has happened once in the mind,—hasn't that happened for eternity? Listen. Let me tell you another thing. No sooner had I feared that my wife was pregnant (feared, because I had neither the money nor the strength to support such a responsibility), than in a flash I could see in my mind's eye the pallid little head of my hairless infant. I was holding him in my inexperienced arms, and was alone in the house. I carried him to the window, I stuck him out just as a joke, and to let him see the open air and the sky. Suddenly an inadvertence, an imprudent movement, a well-calculated slip, and baff!—the baby falls head first onto the pavement below. I see it all,—it smashes its fragile little cranium against the corner of the curb, just as

an herb-vendor is passing, and out come its brains. There. Am I not a parricide?"

"A horrible disorder of the imagination. You call it parricide. There may have been other moments, however, when you felt your heart stir with tender emotions and your eyes fill with tears at thought of your little one."

Filippo nodded affirmation.

"Now, these tender imaginings don't make of you a good father, and neither does that hair-raising fantasy of yours make you a parricide. If everything that passes through the minds of men were said in so many words and executed in deeds, the entire universe would at once be precipitated into chaos. Why, Christ Himself, upon the cross, accused His Father of having abandoned Him!"

"You," he went on, after reflection, "are a hardened sinner against the Holy Spirit."

"And what is the Holy Spirit?" asked Filippo, as one who seeks a scientific elucidation.

"The Holy Spirit!" exclaimed Father Mariani, turning red and growing heated. "Why, that's the third person of God, the one in whose name the Church and the human race will progress. It's the one in whom divine inspiration was manifested to the Apostles after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that is celebrated on Pentecost Sunday. The day before yesterday, —the very day you were released from prison; and that's an auspicious day, heralding sign of the grace that will illuminate you. In former days court actions were suspended during Pentecost week, as an earthly anticipation of divine pardon. What is the Holy Spirit! It is the *lumen cordium,* the *lux beatissima,* the *fons purissimus,* that which 'dissipates the horrible darkness of the mind' and 'purifies the inner eye of man that he may behold the Father, Whom it is given only to the pure in heart to see.' It is the breath that blows wherever you wish, the Paraclete, the protector, the defender, that without the protection of which all examination of conscience is in vain, in which case wrong and right, false and true cannot be distinguished, and the act of contrition may become defiance and the humiliation of the sinner, blasphemy."

"Yes," commented Filippo when, he thought, he had let the man finish his sermon, "but how can I get the Holy Spirit to blow in the direction that will avail me? The Holy Spirit rejects me!"

"Pray to it. Render yourself worthy of it with true humiliation. I'll quote you a lay text that you'll be able to understand better than the holy. It's almost a prayer in itself:

"'Noi t'imploriam! Placabile
Spirto discendi ancora,
Ai tuo cultor propizio,
Propizio a chi t'ignora.'"

"But it's implacable with me! It's not propitious! I was born damned!"

"There!" cried Mariani, "that's heresy! You imagine that you have no religion, that you're an atheist, a strong spirit. And instead, no, no, you have a religion, just like the rest of us. Only it's a ferocious religion. You're a Protestant like almost all of your contemporaries, and a fetichist of success and accomplishment and power as the supreme law; the devotee of a religion that subjects the reality of the human being to the frenzy of reason, which confuses thought with action, and, if it name God, names Him only to blaspheme. It gives Him a blind countenance, like Fate, and the surly look of a tyrant. It overturns His world and divides it into two parts: a prison into which are born the souls of the damned, and a royal palace where are born the blessed. That's not a religion; it's the idolatry of Matter and Success. All our contemporary society—and not the Germans alone, oh, no, is infected with it. Years ago I was suspected of modernism. I submitted. *Laudabiliter.* But in my innermost soul I prayed and worked in the hope—surely proud and sinful—of aiding the cult of the Holy Spirit, and of hastening, if only by the fraction of a moment, the advent of a new epoch in the Church and in society. But of Luther's flock and his professorial followers, no, never. That's a heresy which is wreaking havoc everywhere. It's wrought havoc even upon the fields of battle. Yes. It's scattering destruction everywhere. It's more insidious than Arianism."

"I don't say no," insisted Filippo quietly. For a short while it had been he who spoke calmly and Father Mariani who was shrieking. "I ask, How am I to win the favour of the Holy Spirit? That's what the priests are for, isn't it,—as intermediaries between men and God? That's why I came to you."

"I," muttered the priest in a voice that was almost exhausted, "have already told you. I am unworthy."

Then, without raising his voice, he resumed:

"You, my dear son, have been a warrior, a violent spirit, like all your contemporaries,—those who have waged war and those who haven't, the heroes like yourself as well as the cowards. You've come to a poor servant of God as if you would wrest grace from me by sheer force. Oh, if I were only the depository of that grace, my dear son, how gladly would I pour it out upon you, as much as you wished! For it is an inexhaustible treasure. But you want to conquer the reign of God with a wager, at a stroke. No, no. The stronghold of the Lord is taken neither by stratagem nor assault. It is inexpugnable. Its gates are countless and open to the humble."

"And what must I do?"

"Exorcise your violence. Without truce. Without pausing for breath. The same hymn that I recited to you a little while ago, says to the Holy Spirit:

'Scendi bufera ai tumidi
Pensier del violento.'"

"There!" cried Filippo triumphantly, with forefinger extended. "There's not a doubt that I was filled with tumid, violent thoughts that morning. The spirit bloweth whereso-ever it listeth. That's what the Holy Spirit did for me."

"Sophist!" shouted the priest, beside himself. And so great was his agitation that the little table between him and Rubè shook and the *rossoli* was spilled from the untouched beakers. The servant opened the door a trifle and appeared in the chink. Father Mariani, motioning the woman to leave, slowly made the sign of the cross.

"You," he said to Filippo, "lead me into temptation. I

know that such is not your will. God forgive me. Perhaps some other will succeed in that which God does not permit to me. Your very perturbation, your very sinister grief, the very excess of the calumniations with which you lacerate your soul, are signs that grace will not fail you. The words at first will sound empty and mechanical, but little by little you'll feel them quiver with faith. Let me, however, give you a bit of secular advice. You ought not to forget to see a physician. Why, for instance, don't you go to your friend Federico? Although . . ."

Filippo, who up to the moment of this advice had listened to his words with an eager mien, here interrupted, and smiling with a single corner of his mouth, said:

"Truly, if I need any one, it's Professor Antonio Bisi, a specialist in shell shock. But I could never understand how a physician could have any faith in a priest or a priest in a physician. This infected society of which you spoke is composed of physicians and lawyers."

"There exist," explained Mariani patiently, "the soul and the body, and the body is the instrument or the chain of the soul. Besides, Federico Monti may be more and better than a mere physician of the body. I don't need to mention his wife who is a saintly soul; but he himself, although his misfortune has been tremendous, has written me a letter which I should venture to call Christian. Not quite Christian as yet; stoic, rather, which is a sort of dawn glow that precedes the daylight of Christianity. I am confident, however, that day will break in his soul. It may be that his language, which is still reasonable and I may say secular, will be more easily intelligible to you, and that the consolation of friendship will touch your heart."

Without any visible tokens of his attitude, Filippo had rebelled at this talk. "His misfortune has been tremendous!" As if there could be nothing worse than to lose a leg, when there are millions of them and no woman has been drowned in a lake. Yes, there was something worse, and Signora Adriana had said it: to lose one's head.

"Perhaps I'll go to see him," he said, without lifting his eyes

from the floor. But Mariani knew that his visitor was merely talking for the sake of saying, and asked him:

"Are your father and mother alive?"

"My mother is. My father died five years ago."

"Then go to your mother before returning to your kind and courageous wife. The family, the paternal home, is a natural church, which rarely denies a comfort and prepares the soul for greater consolations."

"I had thought of that. In fact, I'm on my way to Calinni."

A silence followed. Then Filippo took his leave. He pressed the priest's hand and tried to kiss it, but Mariani withdrew it.

"Forgive me," Filippo said, with a lump in his throat.

"It is you who should forgive me," responded Mariani. And from the landing he added: "After you've got back to your home town come and see me again sometime. You'll be far better, then, I'm sure. Yes, I'm sure. Mothers can work miracles."

He had already descended a couple of stairs, and without turning around, made a gesture of quiet desperation, brushing his hair. The servant did not have the courage to feel him at her shoulder and followed him, candlestick in hand, to open the street door for him.

Mariani opened his window, and peered out beneath the starry sky. He hoped that Filippo might turn around on the sidewalk, so that he might wave a friendly good-bye to the man. Instead, he saw him disappear somewhat bent into the night, and heard the dying sounds of his footfalls.

"Annarosa!" he said to the woman, who had returned. "I don't need anything else. Go to bed."

As he gave himself up to long prayer, accepting as a punishment the impossibility of touching that unhappy man's heart, the man himself walked back in leisurely fashion to his hotel. He did not take the strange, circuitous way that he had come, but merely avoided the more frequented thoroughfares. But it was already past midnight.

Once, when he had been a boy, he was returning, after

vacation, to the city and school, and he was crying; as he cried always, for hours and hours until after endless embracing of his mother and his sisters the desire for the city and his schoolmates woke in him anew. He had his face pressed against the window of the train, crying and gazing through his tears at the sea. But a tiny fly happened to enter his eye, and for the entire duration of that journey, although a burning grief filled his being and seemed to lie inconsolable at the bottom of his heart, he could think of nothing but the fly and how he was to get rid of him, and of those itching tears that had another taste altogether. Now he thought of that fly, for a dry, pungent pun had come into his head: "I've fallen from Priest to priest." [1] He knew that this was a wretched, unjust play upon words, although for a long part of the walk he felt it in his ears as one feels a dead fly in his eye.

Having almost reached the hotel, he was struck by a yellow light that issued from the station: the telegraph office.

"Oh," he said, "but I was supposed to send a telegram."

All at once it seemed impossible for him to go to Calinni.

For a few seconds he stood motionless, attempting to formulate the message. An urgent telegram to Federico. "Advised by Father Mariani to pay you a brief visit. If you consent to receive me, I beg you to send a rush telegram, using this address exactly as I give it. Filippo Morello. . . ." Then followed the name of the little known hotel, with the street and the number of the door.

Back in his room, he began to undress, but suddenly he put on all his clothes again, for, from the trembling that he felt under his bosom he could see that sleep was far away. The room was nearly empty, containing a curved black iron bed, a tiny table, and a lone lamp suspended from the centre of the ceiling.

"Let's reason this thing out. Let's have a little light on the matter. I'll go to Federico, if I go, whenever I do go. The main thing now is to understand. Some of the things that holy man said—said? howled, I mean—aren't at all non-

[1] The name of the judge—Sacerdote—is also the Italian word for priest.

sensical. Perhaps all of them. Certainly the priest knows more than the judge. First: I never did believe in any God other than Success, in any paradise other than the earthly paradise. Very true. Second: I'm a sick man. Likewise very true. I've been told many times, even by Federico, that I have a hypochondriac nature. A neurasthenic, a hysteriac. My mother has told me, too, that when she was nursing me I'd writhe with indigestion, and then I was always hot-tempered, had worms, and distended my eyes. Then how am I to blame? If the kitchen is old and dirty, where could I cook a good *nutrimentum spiritus?*

"But my confessor would say that religion isn't manufactured in the stomach, and that I fashioned my religion, my fetich, Success, in my brain, in my soul. I believed only in Success. Only another way of saying that I was an adventurer. He's right. I sought only pleasure, money, and success.

"There! There!" he interrupted himself, imitating Father Mariani's voice. "There's the devil in the clock, the confounded devil! Seize him! Grab him! Shoot him! Out of ambition I imagined I was the murderer of my mistress (yet I was, I was her murderer), and now through ambition I want to promote myself to the position of a holy martyr.

"Ah!" and he bounded up. "Can this be delirium?

"Che!" He had sat down again beside the bed, inwardly uttering that *che* with Marco Berti's clicking of the tongue. "*Che!* I never had delirium. This is sheer grief; sheer grief. I only swooned once, so to speak. To extinguish this brooding conscience of mine it needs death. Enough. Extinguish my conscience! It illuminates me like a veritable searchlight, enough to drive a fellow mad!"

He raised his eyes toward the blear-eyed lamp that hung from the ceiling, and laughed.

"Away with searchlights and my accustomed exaggerations. The fact is that I'm an intellectual. An in-tel-lect-u-al. Inside my bosom, nothing. Oh, yes, a hydraulic pump to send the blood up and down. No heart. Neither free nor beastly. Incapable of doing good or willing evil. A single thing ac-

complished spontaneously, even a crime, a massacre! Then I'd be saved."

"Kill yourself!" cried a voice to him, so sharply that it seemed to come from a corner of the gloomy room.

He looked at the chain from which the lamp hung, and laughed again.

"Kill yourself! Fine words. And if I don't succeed? The chain breaks, the revolver fails to go off. I never succeeded in anything, never. Didn't I tell you that I was a misadventurous adventurer? And what's more, to be frank, I must confess that I'm afraid that I've always been afraid, and that Eugenia, my kind and courageous wife, knows it. There's my complete confession. Complete confession! I hadn't made that, in full, unsparing detail, even to Father Mariani."

All at once it seemed that he could judge matters and decide with perfect clarity. "I'm neither a martyr nor a victim. I'm a poor, transplanted lawyer. All I need is to find my roots again, learn my name. The devil, that's Pulcinella's secret: know thyself. Go back to Calinni. Seek out your family, that natural church which rarely denies a comfort. But, Father Mariani, it's clear that the key to the solution lies there. I've clarified the whole matter now. I'll go there directly. I don't remember my past at all; hardly remember my mother. Why, I never had time to think of them! I can't recall. *I don't remember.*"

Who was it that had said "I don't remember" in almost voiceless accents that seemed the breath of a budding rose? There, before him, stood Celestine, alive, breathing, her countenance as sad and ecstatic as that of some immortal sister. He was seated on the ground, with his knees between his hands, and now prostrated himself in his entire length upon the floor.

"Up to now, Celestine, I've wept and raved only for myself. I haven't shed a single tear for you, Celestine! And your son, tell me, your little son Henri, when are you going to make that airplane for him?"

Then from his eyes flowed a long weeping, without a moan. The light went out. It was dawn. "This is weeping, yes,

this is," he said. "If I have compassion on anybody, some one will take compassion on me. O, Lord, make me cry, make me cry. More. More."

And he fell asleep thus upon the floor. When he was awakened, his soul was dark and empty.

There had been a knock at the door.

"There," he said, jumping to his feet with pains wracking every part of his body, "they've discovered me and have come to arrest me again. It was high time."

But as he cautiously opened the door, he hid behind the panel, for he was covered with dust and tears. A telegram was put into his hand.

"Come. At once. We are waiting for you. Federico."

CHAPTER III

After opening the window he realised that he had been sleeping for a few hours. The June morning sky was still a shadowy velvet shot through with sunbeams. The fresh air, which seemed to have passed through the spray of a fountain, danced almost visibly into his room, as if leaping over the window-sill and declaring, with a swish, that the earth could not be sad under so benign a sky. It was the same beautiful sky of all beautiful June mornings, and Filippo was not sorry.

There was still time, if he made haste, to catch the train that left before noon. He brushed himself, washed and washed his eyes, which were reddened with weeping, and rumpled the bedclothes, so that the servants should not wonder in what strange manner this traveller had passed the night. Until he became busy with the hurried tasks of departure,—his bill, the tips, his quick steps upon the square, with the porter at his side carrying the bag—he thought that he had lost his memory, and that he had left confessions and delirium in the hotel as the invisible shadow of his body upon the floor. But, when he heard the voice of the porters in the vestibule and the hubbub of the departing travellers, he was for an instant astonished and rolled his amazed eyes about, asking: "What are you going to do? Where are you going?" The panes of the glass roof dimmed the blue, and then it seemed to him that the phantoms of the night had been reality, and that this radiant happiness of the sky, on the other hand, was a mere phantom.

Too late to change his mind. A train that is leaving always draws one magnetically, just as one arriving is preceded by a puff of wind which fascinates the beholder, as if it were pleasant to stand along the tracks waiting for it to come in. There were no seats to be had. At first this provoked Filippo, because he would be more noticeable standing. Then it occurred to him that the denser the crowd was, the easier he could sink

into obscurity, and he was content to stick his head toward the little window, as in this way he had no one facing him. Whenever he overheard a lively conversation, or on the other hand noticed that the voices of two travellers suddenly grew hushed and confidential, he would cock his ear, for it was impossible that they should not be discussing the tragedy on the lake and pointing him out. But no; they were discussing the Allies and the Jugoslavs and the ministries and the prices of exchange and coal,—all matters that were more noteworthy than a tragedy upon a lake in which only a woman had lost her life,—a catastrophe that may have happened on no lake at all, but rather in his diseased imagination. Otherwise it would hardly be admissible that the trees should run by so, in a beautiful athletic race, to meet his train, and that the train should fly on the wings of its own wind, which was as fresh and festive as that which applauds the passing of the flag.

Of course, whenever any one said "Please," wishing to pass with his bag from one compartment to another, or "Beg your pardon," for having jostled against him, that person's glance was always veiled with suspicion and aversion. But everybody had been the same way with him, even before the drowning in the lake; or at least so it seemed to him. Everybody, except Eugenia. Then he recalled that this train was an express to Milan, and he told himself, just for the sake of talking, that nothing compelled him to get off before that terminal. No military order, for example, no order of arrest. As a boy, he continued to recall, whenever he came upon any officers, he would stumble all over himself as if his feet were tied, though he certainly had been robbing no fish from the stands. Nor had he as yet drowned anybody, except a little sparrow,—a horrible thing, just the same, for which Lucietta, crying at the top of her lungs, had betrayed him to his mother,—in the foamy depths of the laundry tub. How many times since, at Rome, especially when his health was not of the best, had he glanced at his shoes to see whether they were torn! For some person who had come walking toward him had eyed him with such insolence, from head to foot and back again from foot to head. At other times some one would leave a sticky glance upon his

back, as viscous as the slavering of a snail. Who was it? Some one he knew? But when, where? Had he been offended because Filippo did not salute him? Some enemy? He would turn around to see. Ha, the other fellow, too, had turned around, and the two hostile glances would cross like blades. In the other glance there was hatred, in his a little dismay. He shuddered. To be looked at so by people he must bear on his face some sinister token of predestination.

Travelling standing had its advantages and disadvantages. It was a gain in that folks looked at him very little; but he suffered physically. He had noted a vestige of his old illness two days before at Alessandria and the previous night, returning to his hotel after the confession. Now it had returned in full force. Analysing himself part for part, he noted strange unevenesses of temperature and weight in his body. His lower brain weighed more than his upper and pained him with a stifling, nauseous pain; his heart, which felt lighter and uncertain of position, seemed intent upon shifting and rising toward his shoulders; he could feel the skin of his abdomen palpitating, as if it had not yet been entirely closed after laparatomy, with a sense of vacancy toward the left; his dorsal spine, at the height of his loins, seemed exposed, filled with air, as if it had been perforated; his calves were weak, rotten, in shreds; the contact of his soles with the ground seemed insecure, so much so that he had to stamp hard upon the floor, as if he were cold, and as if to say: "There. Yes. I'm on solid earth." His pain was everywhere at once, yet nowhere. At moments all his warmth would flow to his head; and he would puff and feel a desire to throw himself through the window. Years before, speaking to a physician, he had said: "Imagine the sensation of a fruit with its rind intact, yet all worm-eaten inside. That's how I feel." The physician had smiled: exhaustion, slight neurasthenia, rest, open air, the yolks of eggs, injections. Then, during the early months of the war, the same ailment had returned, especially when he had heard the airplanes throbbing over his head, and he had thought that exhaustion was merely a polite name for cowardice. "You'll agree, Father Mariani; a fellow who's at the point of death

may have his little boast. My fear, at bottom, was simply pity for myself and for others, for I was not born to kill." Now, observing his limbs, each of which wished to do and feel in its own particular fashion, he achieved a better understanding of the real nature of his malady: this not knowing how to hold oneself together, this centrifugal urge of a body that will not obey and would prefer to scatter itself all about, casting off its name and calling itself no longer Rubè or Burè or Morello. So-called neurasthenia, he concluded, is the centrifugal motion that punishes egocentric natures.

This definition interested him and took his mind off other matters. Here was the Tiberian valley coming up, and Valdarno going down. The olive trees. The soil sent forth a silver incense to its sky, and the sky rewarded it with a shower of gold. The cypresses, as straight as silent, happy men; rooted, and beyond the danger of being uprooted, in the fragrant earth. The sight of the Tuscan cottages, with gutters that seemed to have been manufactured expressly for the swallows, and of the green shutters that mirrored the green of the landscape, made one feel that they were peopled by folk of a gentle language. Beautiful things to see, to know, even from the bottom of a coffin. Even to the last of men the bounding train vouchsafed a happiness of its own: to close his eyes, if there had only been a place to sit down. As long as the run lasts, there is nothing to wish or do; the engineer is master, destiny. There is no evasion; no choice; as in the trenches, in prison, in overpowering illness.

Arezzo. Filippo hardly took a bite at the station restaurant, for when he was in such a mood he could barely swallow a thing. Of a candyboy he bought a package of biscuits and chocolates, to take to the Ritorno. What should he do now? In the pastry-shop's mirror he caught a reflection of his temple locks, which yesterday might have appeared sinister to him, but to-day were simply ridiculous, rendering him unpresentable to so decorous a gentleman as Federico. Federico doubtless had suffered through the loss of his leg all the more intensely because nobody with a wooden leg can ever hope thereafter to be correct, inevitably robbed of his perfectly elegant, aristo-

cratic appearance. He, with those two patches of hair on his cheeks, looked like a Bourbon portrait of a hundred years before, or like an Austrian police officer. And he was letting them grow so that he could not be recognised. Why, precisely because he wore such outlandish whiskers he would attract the attention of everybody!

At the gate to the estate a peasant offered to show him the way. The house was somewhat farther up. Filippo stopped twice during the ascent. At first he was attracted by a niche under a little bridge trimmed with American vines. There was the Madonna with her Son taken off the cross, and a Latin inscription: *Dolorem exprimit quia novit amorem.* "She expresses grief," he translated to himself, "because she knows love." . . . "Then," he deduced, "I could not be suffering as I am unless I had loved." His gaze wandered higher up and rested upon a meadow enclosed by a half-circle of chestnut-trees. The land and the trees faced east and at that hour were in the shadows, but lay under a light so pure that it seemed a vast illumination of stars. Near to a chestnut tree stood two very youthful peasant girls, their tresses wrapped in a kerchief, slowly munching their bread. Beside them frisked a long white dog speckled with brown, ceaselessly yet patiently wagging his tail as if it were the pendulum of Time. These objects and these creatures, it seemed, had been there from the beginning of things, and would remain there forever; and Filippo, alternately pausing and resuming his climb, could not remove his eyes from this serenity of sadness.

Federico was not expecting him so soon.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, kissing him upon the cheeks, so that Filippo feared the patches at his temples would annoy him, "This time the telegraph has really wrought wonders."

He wore white trousers, a black jacket, and a silk shirt. Mary, who had been sitting beside him, was dressed all in white, but not with that gleaming white which formerly had made her look like a sail against the background of Santa Maria degli Angeli. It was a simple woollenette dress, with a very long, flat-plaited skirt and a waist that reached as far

as the chin. Her face no longer contained anything but eyes and hair. "A ruin, a memory," thought Filippo, before whose inner eye passed, one after the other, Celestine and Eugenia. And he was amazed that once upon a time he could have desired this woman.

Thus meditating, he had placed the package of sweets upon the rotating bookstand in the centre of the room, and had sat down in front of his two friends. He scrutinised everything meticulously: the convergent glances that Federico and Mary simultaneously shot toward the box of candy, and which at once they withdrew in the same instant, like the horns of a snail; the fleet, feminine glance in which Mary enveloped the protagonist of a love tragedy; the ill-concealed zeal with which they eyed him all over, from his somewhat dishevelled hair to his dusty shoes.

"Did you have a pleasant journey? Pleasant journey?" they asked, almost in unison.

How correct! How just and moderate a social tone! And how neatly everything was set amidst these antique furnishings! And what an impassive light, worthy of an Olympic afternoon, flowed in through the window, as changeless as the blue of an immortal pupil! Filippo was almost content with all this, for he foresaw that the conversation would wander in curves as wide and tranquil as those of the good stream Arno, and that they would talk of everything under the sun except Celestine and the fingernails that rent her chemise under water. No sooner had he set foot upon the shining threshold than he had asked himself: "What am I to say to them now? Shall I tell them the horrible story of yesterday evening? Shall I cry to them, in the voice of a leading man in a drama, 'Cure me, doctor; save me, friend?' Shall I assail him as I assailed Father Mariani last night? Such things aren't done in polite society."

As his guest was silent, Federico spoke again:

"Dear Filippo, I thank you ever so much for having accepted Father Mariani's advice. By coming to me you give me proof of friendship, for you may well believe in my friendship. This house cannot give you happiness, nor is that what you are

seeking, but it can give you peace and resignation. It is very quiet. You can live here at your ease as long as you wish. You could have come here without sending any previous notice."

"My telegram," answered Filippo, "must have pulled you out of bed in the wee small hours. It didn't occur to me until it was too late that I might disturb you so. I was counting on the regular delays of the postal-telegraph service."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that."

He surprised a residue of old rancour in Filippo's wandering eyes.

"It's queer how distant we've been for some time, and I'm . . . that is, we are so happy that you've thought of us again. For my part, my dear Filippo, I've always been fond of you. We've been at odds for almost five years over the question of intervention and neutrality. That's a long time. And it's interesting to see, now, that we were both equally wrong."

"And how do you make that out?" asked Filippo, happy to describe with his own hands one of those curves of the conversation upon which he was counting.

"Why, it seems clear enough to me. You interventionists wanted to force history, at the very same time that you proclaimed (and there's no denying that subsequent events have justified your contention) that the will of history was ineluctably directed toward war. Then why did you wish to be the midwives of the ineluctable? You must confess that the operation was superfluous and even looked a bit ferocious. We partisans of neutrality, on the other hand, tried to veto the inevitable and struggle against the ineluctable; a vain undertaking. You fellows were willing to suffer—I'm talking now of the ones who acted in all good faith, and not of those who evaded the bullets—but you wanted to have your neighbour suffer, too, and that was not within your rights. While we didn't want to have our neighbour suffer, above all we didn't want to suffer ourselves. That, too, was a vain undertaking."

Mary had taken up a darning-needle and listened to the conversation as she worked.

"But then," asked Filippo, his curiosity roused, "what should have been done?"

"Nothing. We should have allowed history to take her course. And we should have been ready, in case history really wished war, as she did, to suffer all that was necessary to suffer, without a groan for any reason whatsoever."

"But, my dear Federico," observed Filippo, with a certain air of superiority, "if everybody had done as you say, there would have been neither war nor victory, nor this war nor this victory, nor any other war nor any other victory. History is made by passions and men."

"That's yet to be seen. That's yet to be seen. But, in any case, what harm can there be in my thinking that everybody ought to believe and act in such a way that if every one else were like him, war, violence, and evil would be impossible?"

"Utopias."

But he regretted this commonplace reply and added:

"For my part, I renounce my interventionism. You're welcome to it. I wished for the greatness of my country, and instead it seems that everything is going to pieces. I was seeking something for myself in the war, too, I confess,—a reason for existence, for dying, an *ubi consistam*. And instead I've lost in it everything that I had."

"Indeed, from your wife's letters it seemed to me that a major part of your bitterness came from practical embarrassments."

Bitterness, he called it! And what were these "wife's letters?"

"You were wrong," continued Federico, "to forget that you had a friend, and I'm sorry to think that those about you didn't remind you of that fact. I am not rich, but I wouldn't have asked better than to give you a little proof that the world is not a forest of wolves. But now that your parents-in-law have come together again things will be going a little better. For the rest, the after-war will come to an end, just as the war itself did, don't you think?"

"He knows everything," said Filippo to himself. And also: "Who knows? If Eugenia had reminded me that I had a benefactor friend, perhaps I might never have gone to the gambling house, nor boarded the Simplon train. Monti is far

superior to Garlandi in every way." But when he had ceased this inner speaking, he began, with a certain gravity:

"You're mistaken, dear Monti. I was not referring to material losses, nor to having sunk a fortune in the war. Economically I was never so well off as in the trenches and in hospital. I had everything provided for me. The after-war, too, has its resources, and at this moment, for example, I am very wealthy. I meant to say that in this war I lost the little that I had in my soul, in my brains. At first it seemed to me that there must be in it some reason for living or dying; now I see, if ever, the necessity of dying, but no longer any reason whatsoever either for living or dying. No, none."

"What would you have?" explained Federico amply. "The war was terribly long and desperate, like the Trojan war, but in colossal proportion. Did you know that I had resumed, taken up the Greek classics?"

He got up, stamping upon the floor with his long wooden leg, upon which his bust seemed roosted like a caged eagle upon its perch, and took out a volume.

"Here, read this strange passage," he said, pointing to two lines that had been underscored with red pencil.

Filippo read: "No longer is the battle between Trojans and Achæans, for now the Greeks wage war against the immortals themselves."

"Exactly," elucidated Federico. "Ever since the armistice was signed, the horrible battle is no longer between the Germans and the Allies, but man is battling against immortal ideas. They deny them, they pursue them, they would strike them down. In Hesiod," and he turned the leaves of a second volume, "I have discovered these other words that seem to have been written in our very day: 'Jove the Father created a third race of speaking men, bronze-hued and in no wise resembling the silver race,—a violent, terrible race of ash trees. They laboured at the tasks of Mars, bearers of conflict, and all manner of violence; neither did they live upon corn but had hearts as hard as adamant, inaccessible.' The after-war is the age of ashes.

"You see," he resumed, after setting down the volumes, "we

are still too deep in the war and too small before the vast events to dare measure them. To have taken part in them or lived through them is in itself an enormous accomplishment, and it would be altogether silly to arrogate to ourselves the authority of sitting in judgment over them. Naturally we are nauseated, overfull of the ideas and phrases that have been echoing in our ears for years. The fire has become ashes and takes away our breath. When the procession is over, even the bearers of the saint, fanatics though they be, are weary of the wooden statue that has sweated them all up and exhausted them. We don't want to hear any more talk of saints. All this speechifying about principles of nationality, liberty, justice, strikes us as a hoax. We are fagged out. Then will follow our children, and our children's children, and will pardon us. They will justify us, they will exalt us."

"In short, you've become an interventionist."

"I shouldn't say that. To be sure, Italy's intervention is an important scene, but a scene that's only part of the whole drama. It seems probable to me that Italy, of all the nations that participated in the war, will not come out worst in the destruction. But that's not what I'm thinking of; I have in mind the entire event, which is an undetermined matter, and which cannot be eyed from top to bottom, saying, 'I wouldn't have made war, I'd have done so and so, I'd have had it end in a different way.' I am trying to learn to consider it with that respect which my friend Father Mariani exacts for what he calls the will of God."

At last Mary spoke:

"And why," she asked, "would you call it differently?"

"Dear Mary," he replied, placing upon her thin shoulder a broad hand that, it seemed, must crush it, "it's a matter of terminology. We physicians, being naturalists, are sticklers for terminology."

And he laughed.

"We," he resumed, turning back to his guest, "are very generous with our ancestors who went on the Crusades. There's no reason why posterity should be any harder on us. They'll discover some sense in the European war; perhaps that which

we gave it . . . or, rather you, when you wished it and waged it; perhaps some other. To me it seems already a wonderful thing that a war should have been waged around the very idea of war. Entire peoples went willingly to the shambles in the conviction that this would be the last slaughter. I even see a sense in this moral abasement of the after-war. The conquerors themselves are asking whether the victory was worth the trouble. That's something new. And very significant. If the war has diffused a need, even a platonic need, of seeking the solution of new problems in some other way than violence, it cannot be said that your blood and that of your brothers-in-arms, my dear Filippo, has been shed in vain."

But Filippo was suffering. The uneasiness that had gripped him all that morning,—that sort of seething which seemed intent upon pulling his body apart, was still there in his innermost being, lurking in ambush; and now there was added to it this nauseating, unbearable wisdom, recited, as if committed to memory, with the benevolent condescension of the safe and sound, who, from their place upon the shore, give lessons in swimming to the shipwrecked. He could not help glancing at the wooden leg. "With a single leg," he thought, "a fellow can't rush about in a hurry, so that it's hard for him to lose his way." In order to master himself and not allow his malady to get the best of him, he rested with all his weight against the arms of the chair. When, in the other rooms, he heard a footstep, a rustle, a voice, he would cock his ear and run his glance toward the box of sweets and to the closed door, hoping for some interruption to bring this lesson in the philosophy of history to an end. Then Mary's eyes, too, would flash eagerly; but they would return at once to her darning.

"I see," said Filippo with an ironic impulse which he could not repress, "that you're quite engrossed in politics, the same as when you used to discuss affairs with your poor mother. Are you running for deputy?"

"You must be joking," answered Federico, turning red. "Do you believe that I've come here to start my campaign?"

"Campaign!" interrupted Filippo strangely, as Federico and Mary exchanged glances.

"I live in absolute solitude, with only my wife, and I haven't even joined the Association of Wounded Veterans, because I know that Bologna didn't see first-line service. Besides, in what party could I fight? See here: the only logical sides are the militarists and the imperialists, and that's a logic that I don't care for. And the others! The reasonable, temperate bourgeoisie that calls itself renunciatory! Have you heard one of them say, 'This territory would be precious to us, it's a treasure, but we must give it up because to retain it would be immoral?' Not even Bissolati. They all prate about convenience, utility. And then, when you entrust the standard of utility to them, you realise that those who hold to the theory of 'grab whatever you can' wield most influence over the people. . . . Perhaps," he added, after a moment's perplexity, "I am unjust. The morality and the religion of our fellow nationals are very queer; they are ashamed to appear in public, which may be a sign of superfine sensitivity. . . . And as for the large parties, the Catholics promise heaven and paradise on earth. They talk only of conversions; even Pierantoni goes to mass."

"Pierantoni?"

"Yes, my . . . surgeon. I regard this phenomenon with respect, but I have no impulse to emulate him. I cannot forget that I am a scientist. And were I to imitate him, I must accept the dogma, study out an interpretation of it, assume a responsibility. It's better to maintain silence and try to keep pure in heart."

"You'll come over to my way of thinking," said Mary.

And again now, as before, her husband replied by placing his affectionate, heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"And how about Socialism?" asked Filippo.

"The promise of El Dorado."

But Filippo, every time he came near a wealthy person, felt a deep admiration for Bolshevism.

"Nevertheless," he insisted, "you can't deny that it's a wonderful movement, and that Lenin remains the one imposing figure that has come out of the war."

"Wonderful, imposing. Who denies it? I don't deny them

their share of the truth. I don't deny what is beautiful in the will to make of every man a citizen. But so was the science of the past century wonderful and imposing. Yet it produced more wars than the wrath of Achilles. There are many, among the Socialists, who attribute the catastrophe to the idea of fatherland. That's a mistake. How can the idea of fatherland be guilty and destructive, if it's one with the natural fact of being born in a certain place and speaking a certain tongue? The fault lies in having believed, and still believing, in universal happiness. That's an unpardonable illusion which brings hell upon earth. Just see. The whole nineteenth century was an apotheosis of the Land, of wealth, of the body. There were you lawyers to watch over the distribution of wealth, and we physicians and surgeons to maintain the body in health. We had usurped all the functions of the priests. Whole poems were written in celebration of the physician-surgeon in the light of a redeemer. We were bounding ahead under full sail toward the shores of felicity. We could already see it with the naked eye. We were about to land. All at once, July 14th, a squall, and . . ."

"Shipwreck!" completed Filippo, impetuously.

"Exactly," assented Federico, unreflectingly. But this "exactly" was enough for Filippo to understand how distant was his friend's soul from him, and that this physician could certainly not become his confessor; all the more so since the conference continued without interruption and Mary did not raise her eyes from her darning.

"For a time, at least, we must lay aside the ideal of a promised land and the mysticism of energy, which is a form of the mysticism of violence, and we must renounce our faith in the fourteenth of July and in the fourteen points. I have come to the belief that without pessimism there is no salvation. Folks have been told so long, 'Don't believe in heaven, we'll give you the Earth.' They've had demonstrated to them the advantages of the Land, as if one can indicate the beauties of the Valdarno through a window," and he imitated the action of turning toward the window and pointing out to the valley. "So they've all laid siege to the Land, have bent their efforts

toward the conquest of the Earth. Win the war, make peace so and so, and you'll reach the Promised Land." [1]

"Cross this Red Sea of blood," amended Filippo, in the same tone of voice, "and you will touch the Promised Land."

The play upon words impeded Federico like an obstacle, and caused him to hesitate a moment.

"And now," he said, having recovered the thread of his discourse, "both heaven and earth are lost."

He was in his element now, for it was months since he had found any one to whom he might expound his thoughts, and he took ample advantage of the occasion.

"For," he went on, "how are we to tell people that the machine of progress is damaged and that we'll repair it within a few years or a few decades? I don't believe in a new Middle Ages, but neither do I believe that the people can be put off with this fetich of damaged progress."

"On the walls of Milan," recounted Filippo, "I've read the inscription: *Stupid astronomers, the earth does not turn.*"

"In fact . . ." Federico was about to resume.

But at this juncture the tea with tarts, and the butter and honey were brought in. Filippo looked behind the maid's skirts; he had no wish to continue this "platonic dialogue." But no one was there.

"And Juja?" he asked both father and mother, with such candour that the tray trembled in the maid's palms.

"Why, Juja is dead," explained Federico, extending his arms. "It's a month to-day. Didn't you know it? Father Mariani . . ."

"Father Mariani told me that he had received from you a Christian, a stoic letter; that your misfortune was tremendous; but I thought he was referring to your leg."

"Indeed," said Federico, wiping his glasses, "when they took my leg away from me I howled, because it seemed to me that I had an imprescriptible right to my leg. Now I have lost my baby. So that I finally understood that nothing is mine."

[1] The force of this paragraph is weakened in English because we have no word which, like the Italian *terra*, means at the same time *earth* and *land*.

Mary had poured tea with shaking hands, but without spilling a drop. Then, mumbling some excuse, she had fled.

"Was there anything you wished to say to me in private?" asked Federico, when they had been left alone.

"I feel so humiliated to have come here as I did, without knowing, without having seen at the first glance."

And he placed his hand in Federico's.

"Why, no. How are you to blame? I asked you . . . whether you had anything you wished to say to me in private? About yourself?"

"What would you have me say?"

"What are your present plans? What do you intend to do after the days you spend with us?"

"I promised my mother to come to Calinni."

"A wise course."

There was a silence. Then Federico took his hand again.

"Listen. I don't need to say that if I can be of any help to you, I'll do everything in my power, like a brother. There are things that are better done than said. I'm not referring only to money. I'm not rich and I'm worth less than half of what's attributed to me, and the peasants are no easier to manage than the city workmen. But in whatever I can do, count on me as on a brother. And it was wrong of you not to have thought of me sooner."

"But haven't I just told you that I'm as rich as a lord!" and he smiled. "I've five thousand lire, in round figures."

"I was not referring only to money. For example, if you wish your meeting with Eug . . . with your wife, to take place here, Mary could invite her friend to the house."

"Has Eugenia written to you?"

"She wrote to Mary. She's told us everything."

"And . . . what does she say?"

"Well, you can easily imagine that she's not happy. But I'm positive that she'll come back to you. And then the baby."

"Ahh. . . ."

"Do you want me to have Mary write her?"

"Let me think it over."

"See here. May I be perfectly frank, without offence?" He placed his hand upon Filippo's shoulders. "You've made the mistake of applying your terrible logic to your own life even more than to your clients' affairs. You could have been, you still can be, a magnificent lawyer. But as the result of hammering at yourself with your logic you've shattered yourself to bits. And with your excess of imagination you've drawn to yourself certain events that may be called only . . . fantastic. Grievous. Life is not gay, but it is less complicated, less turbid than you make it out."

"Life isn't made that way. Taramanna told me the same thing."

"He's a man of common sense. Be strong. Try to pull yourself together. Accept your shortcomings in a tolerant spirit. Aren't you a bit meridianal, now? A trifle hyperbolical?"

"Certainly," admitted Filippo. But that "certainly" was pronounced with so evident an intention of bringing the matter to a close that Federico himself had to say:

"Very well, let's drop the subject." And he sent for his wife.

They went out for a stroll. The shadows were gliding unhurriedly down the slopes of the Apennines, and the blue of the sky was somewhat thicker, with a desire of stars. They passed the meadow that Filippo had seen on his arrival, and Filippo stopped, looking for the two women and the dog, dumbfounded quite not to find them in their places.

Federico said to him:

"What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing. . . . And what are you folks thinking of doing? Afterward?"

"We intend to return to Rome. I'm going to resume practice, this time in earnest. Yes," he explained, reading the question upon Filippo's countenance, "now that I've reached an understanding of what medicine and science are, and learned that they can cure an organ but not the whole man,—the body, but not the soul,—and that the soul must seek salvation in itself without trusting in any El Dorado or in progress, —now I can begin to act and live anew. And since I can, I

ought. Now, if I wish to establish a family, I've got to get down to business, for in this after-war there's no solid wealth outside of labour. And this really constitutes a step forward."

Mary's wan face had turned flaming red, like the half burning brand that the new fire infuses with heightened colour even while consuming it.

"In all this time," added Federico, "I've never wasted any time in abuse of my leisure. I've been seeking a . . ."

"A certainty," said Filippo, recalling what Eugenia had once written to him. "And have you found it? Or are you hot upon its trail? Close on the heels of Father Mariani's certainty? The reign of God upon earth and paradise in the sky?"

"No, I haven't touched the sky with my fingers. My certainty is not that."

"It is," exclaimed Mary imperiously, reddening again. "If there is not that certainty, then where is Juja? Underground?"

"My certainty is that there is no certainty, yet that we should live as if there were nothing but certainties."

Then he explained that according to his view the future was in the hands of those men who were capable of believing in just causes without expecting of their faith spectacular, universal regenerations,—to men resigned to the admission that evil was ineradicable and good a weak, tottering divinity, needing to be defended day by day to the very last drop of her worshippers. This, he said, was the sense of the times. And he uttered other like sentiments. But his words fell into the vesperal silence that was already pouring from the vast horizon.

It was still daylight when they sat down to table. In the middle of the meal the oil lamp was lighted. The three were silent.

"Do you remember, Signora Mary," asked Filippo, "the day you told me about the wreck of the *Ulysses?*"

At the sound of his words he was struck with dismay. He had never imagined, as he opened his mouth, that he was going to ask anything of the sort.

"I remember," answered Mary, in English, humbly, with her eyes lowered.

Then he was seized with a trembling that he could barely control, and he could not swallow another morsel.

"Why," asked Federico of his wife shortly afterward, "didn't you have Filippo's sweets put on the table?"

Without a word she arose and went to get them herself. Filippo, though he felt as if he were disintegrating entirely, with flames enveloping his cranium and shoving his heart into his throat, managed to say to himself: "This perfect man would be capable of saying to his wife, 'Drink, Rosmunda.' "

Certainly his face must have looked cadaverous, without the calm of the cadaver, if Federico said to him:

"You must be very tired. Too much travelling, and the emotions of the past few days. . . ."

"He calls them emotions!"

". . . have consumed you. I advise you not to drink any coffee and to go to bed right away."

He showed him to the guest room, which was on the upper floor. Filippo lay down across the bed fully dressed.

The window was open and the room without any lights. The full moon was spread across the sky like the wing of a swan. All that night Filippo heard the nightingale. "Addio-dio" it sang, and no greeting could have been sweeter, unless it were the subdued song with which Celestine, on that little lane in Stresa, repeated the plaints of the violoncello.

Later he grew restless.

"What does he think? That he's Noah on the ark? He looks at me out of a little window and says: 'Come in here if you can. I offer you a little corner under my protection. And if you can't, drown; for whom was the universal flood made if not for such as you?' He, after the end of the world, is high and dry at the top of a cupola, for when a fellow has millions he can have himself hoisted as high as he pleases, even to the top of a cupola, even with a wooden leg; and he calls out to me: 'Climb up, my dear fellow; up, my boy, clamber up, for it's ever so comfortable here, and you can read the Greek poets. . . .' And suppose he has telegraphed to Eugenia? If I were to see her here to-morrow, and accept her pardon through

the intercession of Sir Woodenleg? Her first betrothed? And what would Mary think of me? Ah, no!"

He raved on.

He looked at his watch by the light of the moon. It was a little after midnight. He opened the door and walked out, somewhat cautiously, to the head of the staircase.

Federico, who was still up in his study, came out with a light in hand to meet him.

"What is it? Aren't you well? Do you need anything? What were you looking for? . . ."

"Do pardon me. No, nothing's the matter. I didn't mean to disturb you, really. I meant to leave you a note. It's really necessary for me to leave at once. The train from Arezzo comes by here a little after two."

Federico looked with terror into the face of his friend, where he read something more desperate than hate, and was almost abandoned by the strength to dissuade him. To every attempt he made, Filippo would reply with a reason more obstinate than ever, like a boy with whom it is impossible to reason, or like a reasoning madman. He had promised his mother to be at Calinni before the end of the week. Yes, it was true that with time-table in hand he could remain another day at the Ritorno. But who can trust time-tables? No, he couldn't stay. He couldn't and he couldn't.

"Domenico! Cristina! Mary!" cried Federico here and there through the house, in a voice that was a blend of anger and grief. Mary, too, was up.

Despite his most ardent protests they insisted upon accompanying him to the station. Domenico drove the chaise. Nobody spoke during the whole ride. When they reached the station Filippo jumped out before the carriage had come to a full stop, and with a great effort swallowing the lump that had risen in his throat, he said:

"Forgive me. Forgive me, Signora. Such an arrival . . . such a departure. . . . It's really unforgivable. Thanks."

Federico said to him:

"Why, don't mention it, my dear fellow. Be sure to come

to see us whenever you're in this vicinity. I hope you'll be much better soon."

Mary held back her tears.

Then Domenico whipped the horse again.

The olive trees danced a fantastic dance in the light of the full moon.

"It's simply awful," exclaimed Mary, in a voice that vibrated with the half-extinguished echoes of her beautiful contralto, "that we haven't been able to do a thing for that poor fellow."

"The unhappy fellow!" she said, after a silence, abandoning herself upon her husband's shoulders.

He enfolded her waist and caressed her face with his hands, as lightly as he could. But she was as if lulled in the white atmosphere, and could feel only the breath from his mouth upon her own.

CHAPTER IV

One thing pleased Filippo,—he had not yet met any acquaintances or friends on his journey. And in this he lent aid to chance in every way possible: by not pacing back and forth in the aisles, squatting down unobtrusively in a corner, in a position best calculated to effect his desire to disappear, or thrusting his head as far out of the window as he could. In the stations and in the restaurants he selected the tiniest table and the least lighted corner, gazing straight ahead of him with that vacuous ecstatic stare which alienates the attentions of others. For this reason, too, he preferred the night train between Arezzo and Rome. The train was a very fast one, and seemed to flee from the full moon straight into the dawn. He had hardly begun to doze and nod his head sleepily when the long rumble along the platform told him that he was getting into Rome. He was among the last to leave the train, and immediately boarded the train for Naples.

This was a gay train; people were reading the papers and amplifying in a loud voice the news of the riots against the high cost of living that were taking place all over Italy, and more than any other place, in Liguria. One man said: "In a little while, if this trick goes further, they'll be selling chickens at five sous apiece, as they did during the red week of the 14th at Fabriano." Another added: "Yes, but then the hens will go on strike." They laughed heartily and made merry as sound folks will after a visit to the madhouse recalling the amusing antics of the lunatics. Filippo listened avidly without looking at the speakers, bought one newspaper after the other, looked eagerly for the most sensational reports, the most violent happenings. "Oh, what a face!" said a dialect actress to her neighbour. "He's either a Bolshevik or a police officer." But he could not make out her words. He was most interested in the news from Spezia. Good. They were doing well. They

ought to invade the villas of the upper class, the homes of the masters. The factory of the world was crumbling; better raze everything to the ground. The axe. The axe.

At Naples he wandered through plebeian streets where there was scarcely any risk of meeting with former schoolmates; or he remained for hours at a time in out-of-the-way, squalid coffee-houses, before a coffee-sherbet which he allowed to melt. He read the papers, but he was no longer curious about the revolts, and fairly spelled out every item, pronouncing the syllables to himself, from the top of the first page to the advertisements of iron beds and the high numbers in the lottery. He wanted to go ahead on the night train. For two nights he had had no sleep, and this would be the third. He would sleep at Calinni, in the room painted white,—a bare, empty habitation; in his mother's old linen; to the sound of the ancient weight clock.

As soon as they passed the gulf the landscape became severe. The passengers had heavy, olden voices, and pronounced their words with the expert, melancholy cadence of one who for a long time has known the replies. Out of the bluish glimmer of the compartments issued the sound of snoring, from thick lips of weary expression, such as those seen on masks. But Filippo, all through the night, heard the billows dash against the reefs, and beyond the drawn curtains he imagined a milky sea within the craters of extinct volcanos, such as there are on the face of the moon. During the long stops the guard cried the names of places he knew, though he had never been there,—all alike, huddled together like a flock of sheep on a loop of rocky beach or upon a mountain ridge,—with big, mouth-filling names that reminded one of fishermen's or shepherds' calls,—forgotten names that spoke of warm, hidden things to his heart.

When he got off at the Campagnammare station the morning was already well advanced, and the colours of the land and sea were altogether different from what he had imagined them to be during the night. His eyes, which were still filled with the peace of Tuscany, stared incredulously at this vehemence of contrasts. The sea was sky blue and the landscape was green. But what a blue! And what a green! One might have thought

that every wave, every leaf, was rolled in a sheet of sounding metal, and that this metal was called the utmost-green or the utmost sky-blue. Beyond the tracks, the dusty bushes of faded geraniums and the two rows of eucalyptus (not wavy like those on the Lago Maggiore, put there to counteract the malaria, and looking for all the world as emaciated as sickly persons), the fig leaves, the road,—all were of a desperate white that recalled the sensation of thirst.

He knew the place, rock for rock, trunk for trunk. The tiny station edifice, a few kilometres distant from the interior of the country, was of two stories; on the ground floor he could hear the clicking of the telegraph, while above dwelt the superintendent's family. At the side was the switchman's hut, and ahead, toward the two rows of tracks, was the pump of drinkable water. Between the hut and the wall of an orange grove opened a tiny clearing where the Calinni diligence waited for passengers and the three nags brushed away the flies with the automatic motion of their tails. The windows were protected against gnats and mosquitoes by fine screens of iron wire. The porter, ever since folks could remember, had been an ageless deaf mute, very obliging and very loquacious, as well, in his own way.

To this porter Filippo had entrusted his bag and was already on his way to the diligence, although his guide tried to make him understand, by means of gestures and queer noises, that there were still two and a half hours before leaving time, —that is, until the other train, which came from up yonder and went to Naples, should pass by in the opposite direction. Filippo knew this without having to be told; but he kept on walking, with that inconsistent glance which tried to avoid all encounters.

"Maria Santissima! Don Filippo Rrubbè!" exclaimed a woman's voice.

Filippo had to concentrate his glance in order to recognise Sara, the peasant daughter who had been a domestic in his mother's house at Calinni, and who was then almost an old woman, for a peasant woman is old at twenty-seven. She had married a queer but kindly fellow who was named Nicola Tor-

ella; they called him Cola 'Ngegno. "What are you doing?" his neighbours would ask him. And he, who had tried every trade one after the other, would answer: "Oh, I'm trying something new" (*M'ingegno*). And by dint of trying, for he had no land and the life of a farmhand was too dark, he had succeeded in procuring a position on the railroad, rising as high as switchman. Now husband and wife were nearing fifty; and they helped each other.

"Sara!" said Filippo, regaining his composure. "You here? And how?"

He tried to talk his dialect once more, and from the first he experienced a certain difficulty. "How can it be," he asked himself, "that I have forgotten my own native words, and remember only those I've picked up on the road?"

Sara said to him: "Come into the house, your grace. Your grace must not refuse me that honour. Give me the bag, your grace. I'll make your grace a cup of coffee."

He entreated, "Drop that 'your grace,' and call me, 'you, Filì,' as you did when I was a baby and got you wild."

And truly he felt the need of a friendly soul, and repented his having so much desired to avoid meeting anybody.

As she busied herself with the preparation of the coffee she eyed Filippo every once in a while with a maternal glance, and he looked at her. Sara had always been out of the ordinary for the daughter of peasants, with those robust arms of hers, but with a pale, noble countenance; so much so that Filippo, as a boy, had imagined who knows what secret of birth, and many had marvelled that she, who was so "refined," should marry Cola,—a good fellow, to be sure, but with a face like a Moor and a voice like an ogre's. Now, of course, she was really old, but straight, and her hair—almost all white, flowing smoothly over her long head,—seemed always to have served the sole purpose of covering her head and not adorning it. Her eyes seemed to have been placed in her face only to see with and never to shine. On her cheeks the emaciation of malaria took the place of grace and youth. As she served his coffee and moved quickly about the room in search of the sugar-bowl, the teaspoon, the least patched napkin, she kept telling him of her

affairs. Yes, up to the past year they had been at the Biancavilla station, but now, with the help of God, they had obtained a transfer. The malaria was quite as bad, and besides, they had got used to it, but here they had the advantage of being able to procure things cheaper. "Not as at Campagnammare, where they're all sea folk, all pirates." But from time to time, especially during the big holidays, she would take a coach to Calinni, where she would make up the expenses of her trip in ample fashion, for at Calinni she had a strip of earth the size of a handkerchief, and she would buy from friends, at an honest price, her supply of provisions for the winter. "Do you know what that place is like? What Calinni is? It isn't one of those big cities you've seen. But when a person's been born there, he wants to leave his bones there, too."

Now Filippo was sipping his coffee with that avid, attentive motion of the extended lips with which incurable invalids drink their beverages.

"You're all played out, Filì," she said to him, standing directly in front of him. "You look just as you did when as a boy you returned from your studies at the collegio."

A flash that suddenly illuminated his extinguished eyes interrupted the woman for a moment.

"Then," she went on, "you began to raise the devil in the streets of Calinni and throw rocks from the precipice, and your complexion became healthy and ruddy again. Now go back to your mother, to your sisters, have a rest, eat plenty of good food, breathe in the fresh air, for there's none such as you can get in your native district. If you only knew how anxiously your mother is waiting for you; it's three years since she's seen you and you've always kept writing: 'I'm coming at once,' yet you never came. Your mother is always thinking of the miracle that the Dolorous Virgin worked for you: that the bullet should pass through your chest and you shouldn't have been killed. Is there a mark?"

"There is. That won't pass. And how long is it since you've seen my mother?"

"Since I've seen Donna Giulia, my old mistress? Haven't I just told you? I was to Calinni for Pentecost. To make the

advance payment for the kidney beans. This year, if you don't buy them now, they'll cost their weight in gold when they've got dry."

"And . . . when did you return to Campagnammare?"

"I left Calinni Tuesday noon."

His head sank upon his bosom. Then Giacone's first telegram had arrived before Sara's departure. So she knew, for his mother had made a confidante of her for the past thirty years. And yet she said nothing! She kept silent, with that inexorable silence which is maintained before an inconsolable bereavement or an irremediable shame. Now even the road to Calinni seemed forbidden to him.

"One moment," said Sara, turning to the window. "A moment. I can't now. Don Filippo Rrubbè has just come."

Again he was struck by this unexpected sound of his name, pronounced peasant fashion, with double r and double b. He had forgotten it, and thought that he was called only Rubè or Burè or Morello. "Four names," he said to himself. "And why not ten, a hundred, an infinite number, which would be the same as not having any? What sort of thing is this label branded in fire upon my flesh? This mark? Not to have a name! To disappear! Or else be called only Rrubbè, as they called me when I was a child!"

"Who wanted you?" he asked Sara.

"Nothing. It's my daughter Filomena, who tells me that the clothes are all soaped, if I want to begin washing. Nothing."

Filippo went on without heeding her words. "What news of my mother, my sisters? What are they doing?"

"What should they be doing? Always the same life, Filì. Your mother was thinking of going out of deep mourning at *Corpus Domini,* for it's five years now since Don Demetrio died."

"What? Was she still in deep mourning?"

"She still is. You know, Filì, what mourning a husband is in our parts. In the big cities the living never give a thought to the departed. We always are thinking of them,—always do the same things and think the same thoughts."

"And Sofia? Lucietta?"

"Signorina Sofia cooks, embroiders, at night she reads and she helps mamma in all the household duties. Signora Lucietta, —home and church. She has two children and now she's expecting a third. Every two years she presents the Vice-prætor with one. Such is the will of God. . . . My son, the same life as ever."

"So that the earth doesn't turn, at Calinni."

"And when has the earth ever turned, Filì?" said Sara, smiling. "When the earthquake comes, yes. But it's so many years now, thank the Lord, since the earthquake last came. How many is it? Wait. . . ." and she made the computation upon her fingers. "Eleven, God be praised."

For a while they remained silent. Then Sara said:

"Listen, Filì . . ."

It seemed as if she were about to say something very important, and likewise very difficult to bring to her lips. Filippo bent forward.

"Listen, Filì. The clothes are all soaped with the tub ready, and Filomena is waiting for me. You know what children are like. If their mother's not there, they can't do a thing. Excuse me, won't you? No offence? Maybe you want to come along, too? When you were a little bit of a fellow you used to be right beside me in all the work, and you even helped me, as babies will. To-day, by rights, it's a holiday at Campagnammare, and I oughtn't to work. But I have a patron saint of my own, the one that belongs to my birthplace—San Demetrio. Can a person have the patron saints of every district? Then when would there be time to work?"

They went into the tiny courtyard. Filomena handed the clothes to her mother, and when Sara had rinsed and wrung them, carried them off to dry in the sun. Marianna, who came fast upon her elder sister's heels, bustled about in a noisy endeavour to be useful as well, but with little profit.

The two boys, Maso and Lilì, had constructed a sort of coach out of the reeds that grew by the river, and were drawing it about with an endless succession of shouts, to the great but tolerant inconvenience of the women at the tub.

"For you little folks," said the mother to the youngsters, "it's always a holiday, and you certainly are devotees of every saint in the calendar. Maso, pull up your stockings, or I'll send you off barefoot. Here's your mother slaving away at the tub to keep things clean and you dragging around the dust and the dirt all day long. . . . Can't you say anything to Don Filippo Rrubbè? Ill-bred brats! What do you say, now? 'We kiss the hands of the lawyer gentleman.' "

All, male as well as female, wore faces emaciated by the fever and shining, hollow eyes. Only Marianna was fiery red.

"Are all these your children, Sara?" asked Filippo.

"All that are alive," she replied. "One died before he was weaned, but he doesn't count. These four are all I have, since Demetrio died. He was the first, but the Lord took him away."

Filippo raised his eyes in inquiry.

"What? Don't you remember? I had christened him Demetrio in honour of my master, Demetrio. The king took him from me."

"Yes," said Filippo. "I remember. My mother wrote me about it."

"What could I do? What Donna Concettina Mancuso did, when her son was killed in the war? Start to shout, 'Curse the king?' The king is in his palace and doesn't even hear her. Isn't it just as I say?"

"Quite so," said Filippo.

All at once the bells of Campagnammare began to ring. The village was a short distance from the station, half way up the hill, and had three churches and three belfries. But how those few bells re-echoed through the air! If one ceased for a moment, the others danced merrier and louder than ever, with a Ding Dong and a Dong Dong and a Dang Dang that made the very earth tremble, until it seemed to Filippo that the belfries must burst and that the light itself, the very light of this June midday, would quiver with the blaring outburst. But whence did it come? Was it possible that so tiny a village, so humble a spot, should raise its voice to heaven with such a clamour? The ground vibrated under the listener's soles. It was as if he

were at the bottom of a blue ocean, and a submerged continent, an entire Atlantis, were calling for help! help! resurrection! resurrection! with myriad shouts of bronze.

Filippo put his hands to his ears, which ached with the sound. "It's the same thing," he said to himself, "in large cities or hamlets. At Paris, Rome, or Campagnammare: church, cupola, belfry. All the rest disappears. But how far off they are! How high up! It's easier to descend into the abyss than to climb up yonder."

Now the bells struck by their clappers seemed really to burst, to be hurled in pieces through the air. They sent forth the cries of wounded giants. Filippo could feel his heart beating in his throat; he was stifling, as if he were bound in torture within one of those bells, devoured by a vortex of meaningless, pitiless sounds, with two rills of blood flowing from his tormented ears.

"Tell me," he asked, half furious and half desperate, when there came a momentary lull in the din, "what's the reason for all this racket? What's happening in Campagnammare?"

"What? Don't you remember? Don't you know that to-day is the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, the patron saint of Campagnammare? This is the month of June, the month of the big holidays. First came the Assumption, on the last Thursday of May; then Pentecost; to-day is Saint Anthony, and Sunday, Trinity. Then the Corpus Domini, followed by Saint John, and then Saint Peter and Paul, and the month of June is over. Don't you ever think of Saint Anthony? He's a miracle-working saint. Once a rascally young man—no, not rascally, but young men are warm-blooded—gave his mother a kick. Then he repented, and what do you think he does? Takes a big knife and cuts off his foot. Then what do you think Saint Anthony does? Reattaches the foot, sticks it together at just the right spot, as if it were the leg of a table. Another time a young girl, a devotee of Saint Anthony, goes into the sea for a bath and drowns. And what do you think Saint Anthony does?"

"Fishes her out and revives her, I suppose."

"It's all a matter of having faith. . . . Now, I had promised

him thirty-six ounces of wax if he would send me back by Demetrio, even with a leg or an arm missing."

"But he didn't perform the miracle for you."

"Sometimes the saints work their miracles and sometimes they don't. And then there's always a bit of luck connected with the miracles. To-day I'd gladly light those thirty-six ounces of wax if he'd only take away that little creature's cough. But the physician shakes his head and writes another prescription. . . ."

She pointed to Marianna.

It was the hens' feeding time. Filomena opened the coop, and Sara scattered a little corn on the ground. As she called the fowl she sang an inarticulate song that was an incredulously exact imitation of the hens' clucking.

Filippo was seated upon a mossy stone and had a view of the entire horizon. To the left was the sea, to the right, the mountains. What a broad expanse of sea before Campagnammare, and what a vast extent of sky overhead! What a waste of natural beauty for a mere handful of a hundred huts half way up the hill, amidst artichoke gardens and the stench of manure! Even the stream, which was called by the folk Fiumegrande (Great River) and descended from the mountains of Calinni,—how exaggerated it was by that solemn name and the vast bed wherein the waters of Niagara, at the end of their course, might find repose! Yet here there were only a few thickets of reeds and three or four clumps of oleander, dry and burning in the sun as if they were about to take fire, and a mule that stood so still that it seemed carved out of wood. The streamlet, amidst the stones that gleamed like flint, looked at that short distance so motionless and obscure that it seemed its source could lie only in the groins of the mule. The prickly pears, too, exhibited their thorny blades with austere conviction, as if they were monstrances.

"Certainly," thought Filippo, "if Federico were to view this landscape, he would say that it was a hyperbolic landscape. The colours, the lines, the sounds,—everything is exasperatingly out of proportion. Whoever is born into this light, is either left mortified or exalted to the heights of mania, and at a cer-

tain age finds himself with the vacuous eyes of a domestic animal or eyes filled with madness like mine. I know, my dear Federico, that I'm hyperbolic and emphatic even as I think these very thoughts and pose these unlikely antitheses. But your polished Tuscan wisdom, proper to a man bound in urbanity, was not made for me. You must agree with me in one thing, Father Mariani,—that you're grossly mistaken if you think I'm not a Catholic. I am, and such a Catholic! Flagellant. With a conscience ruined by remorse and mourning, the son of my mother who wears heavy mourning for five years in memory of Don Demetrio. Catholic as inquisitorial as any fanatic Spaniard. Don Felipe."

Just beyond Campagnammare the mountains rose as vertiginous as flames. A symmetrical, dramatic opening between the two crags that descended toward the sea allowed a view of the furthest distance. At first there was Campagnammare, a stony step from which a Cyclops might have been able to immerse a foot into the water; much higher, much farther inward, was the second step, the district of Montebello, with its red roofs, enveloped as in the blue of an altar-cloth. In the background was the mountain of Calinni, shooting obliquely toward the sky. Of the town, which was almost all on the opposite slope, the extreme left part could be half glimpsed, rooted upon the edge of the precipice, as pink as the nail of a forefinger, stretched aloft, afar. The mountain was a little more than a thousand metres high; but one had to know this. Viewed from the seashore it looked inaccessible and sacred. Now a white cloud, the only one in the sky, poised itself deliberately over it, as if to hear and speak eternal words. But what was that poor, obscure mountain? A Sinai? "How can I ever scale its heights? Who will lend me the strength?"

These two final queries were pronounced by Filippo almost aloud; so that Sara, holding in her hands a sheet that she was about to wring, asked him:

"What were you saying, Filippo? I didn't catch it."

"I was saying, How can a fellow scale that mountain, as far as Calinni?"

"Are you joking? There's the coach to take you. The

horses make the ascent ever so slowly. And at Montebello they're changed. In an hour the train is due here. Then you can leave. You'll arrive by to-night."

He gazed for a long time toward the summit, which was now clouded and hidden from view.

"Tell me, Sara. Why don't you let me hear something? What's new at Calinni? What's doing? What do they say?"

He hoped, yet feared, that she would repeat the gossip about the tragedy on the lake. She had been there since Tuesday, and every day folks from Calinni came down to the station. Certainly she knew everything, word for word. Instead, however, Sara replied:

"And what news can there be from Calinni? I told you; the same old life. They're all agog now over the elections. There's Don Enrico Stao making a great stir with his promise to return the land to the peasants."

"He, too, is promising the Land?" asked Filippo. And he grew silent, lost in meditation.

"Why, everybody, Sara," he resumed, after a silence, "will have the land whether Enrico Stao promises it or not."

"What are you saying? Are you jesting? And where are they to get all this land?"

"All of us, I tell you, will have the land. Yes, the earth of the grave."

"Ah, that," said Sara without smiling, "the deputy can neither give nor take."

She did not even ask him if he were going to run. Nor did she make inquiries about his wife and the child that was expected. Filomena looked at him very little and incuriously. The three little ones held at a distance, with that spontaneous sensibility with which children avoid things and persons suggestive of mourning.

"Sara," began Filippo, "I wanted to ask you a certain thing. What sort was I when I was a child?"

"What sort were you? You were pale. Thin. Intelligent! You were forever wanting to read and write; not like these children here, with Maso still in the first grade. You were kind hearted."

"Kind? Didn't you say that I was a bad child?"

"You were restless. As an infant you also suffered from convulsions."

"And what did my mother say to me?"

"Mothers say so many things."

"Yes, but didn't she tell me to pray to the guardian angel?"

"Yes, she said that to you, too."

"And how do you pray to the guardian angel?"

"You say: 'Holy Angel, never abandon me.'"

"But tell me,—you who know the truth of things." Sara smiled. "The guardian angel, if one has one,—does he accompany his charge only during life or also in death?"

"Certainly. The guardian angel is the angel of a kindly death. He takes your soul and doesn't let go of it until he's placed it at the feet of the Lord."

The cloud over the Calinni mountains dissolved into the blue. One of its rims, as it melted away, resembled the reclining features of a young woman, serious and piteous as that of Eugenia when, bending over Filippo's bed at Novesa, she had said: "Sleep, sleep."

"It's strange," he thought, "that a fellow should have to come to the end of his life before he can see the face of his guardian angel." Then he heard a voice within him, strong, as if another were speaking inside his bosom: "I must see Eugenia at once." And he bounded up.

"What are you doing? Going so soon? There's plenty of time."

He resumed his seat upon the mossy stone.

"Won't you have a chair? Lilì, go get a chair. What a head on that boy! He lets you sit there on the stone like a beggar."

"I'm perfectly comfortable here. Tell me something else, Sara. What sort of man was my father, Don Demetrio?"

"What sort of man was Don Demetrio Rrubbè? And don't you remember your saintly father, who was mad with love of you and saw only through your eyes?"

"Of course I remember him. But I want to hear from your lips just what sort of person he was."

"A man of golden character, that's what he was. A gentleman such as aren't born these days. A handsome man. With such a moustache. But why are you growing those temple whiskers? They don't become you. He was strong, was Don Demetrio, and honest, upright!" Joining her forefinger and her thumb in a circle she made the gesture of one who is dropping a plumb line. "He had a single motto: All or nothing."

Sara opened her eyes wide and raised her sunken, breastless bust so as to match these virile words with a virile pose.

"All or nothing." Yes, that had been the motto of Don Demetrio Rubè, communal secretary of Calinni. And it had also been the law of his first-born son Filippo. That was why his father had steered him into the noblest of professions, which was the law, and had never advised him to enter the magistracy or an administrative career, to accept a position or compromise with difficulties. It is well known that the free profession is not clear sailing during the first years. Then it's full steam ahead, as had happened with Don Liborio Dimarco, who was the son of a Montebello steward and up to almost the age of forty had "conjugated the defective verbs," whereupon over night he became a celebrated personage and bought the estate where his father had served as steward. Even now, twenty years after his death, the magistrates were wont to remark: "There aren't any more lawyers like Don Liborio Dimarco. The seed is lost." Wherefore, he, Filippo, had never cared to open up an office of his own. He was waiting to lay solid foundations. He didn't care for the petty cases of the common pleas court; in that case he might as well go back to Calinni and compete with a lawyer like Anacleto Mancuso ("a lawyer about the size of my boots," Don Demetrio would say, "with an elementary diploma"). He, the son of Don Demetrio, should seek the definite, the absolute. All or nothing. That was why he had sought out an absolute profession, absolute war, absolute love.

"And tell me," he asked. "What did my father use to do? How did he spend his time when he wasn't at the city hall? Sundays? Nights?"

"No vices. No women. Never any games of cards at the casino. Sundays he would go out into the country and see

what the peasants had done during the week. And how he made them work! He was just, but firm, and there was no trifling with him, you may be sure. At night he read. Big books. All the same size. He'd no sooner finish one than he'd pick up the next. They never ended. He didn't go to church, but he died in the grace of the Lord. *Requiem eterna.*"

Before Filippo's vision rose the volumes of the History of the Consulate and of the Empire of Napoleon I, bound in the style of Bodoni. They were very large indeed; huge tomes; but to him as a child they had appeared colossal; there were a dozen in the set, but to him they seemed at least thirty, a hundred, innumerable.

The bells of Campagnammare once more began to storm.

"Do they still have their processions?" he asked, when a little silence had returned.

"Yes, after dinner. . . ." But she said this with a movement of compassion, raising the left corner of her mouth. "You can imagine what a procession can be like at Campagnammare. They do as much as they can. Now, the Calinni processions were beautiful affairs in the good old days. Do you remember Mastro Biagio's band?"

Did he remember! The leader of the band would march at the head of his men with his chest stuck out, with buttons and braid and visored cap; one would have thought that these musicians were warriors and that he was leading them forth to conquer, with a wave of his stick, the former realm of the two Sicilies, merely as a beginning. He, Filippo, would listen from the balcony, his mouth agape and his eyes wide open, his blood bounding so madly through his veins that it seemed as if it would spurt from every pore. His hands tightly clutched the balustrade, to hold him steady, for his feet tingled with a desire to join the parade, in time to the music,—to follow it to the end of the world. The strains rolled forth from the bells of the brasses like so many thousands of gold coins, rebounding upon the pavement and against the walls. Then, when the band would pass, a multitude would follow in its wake,—half the countryside. And wasn't all this crowd upon the verge of

crying out, as in a single voice, "Viva Filippo! Hurrah for Filippo?" And who was Filippo? An orator, a poet, an admiral, an emperor; all these rolled into one. A man of genius, a renowned figure, heralded in all the newspapers, with his name upon every tongue,—a great man, the greatest of all men. Then when he learned poetry he would recite to his father:

> Generale! che contento!
> Tutto nappe, tutto argento!
> Commandar tanti soldati
> In bell' ordine schierati!

Don Demetrio's eyes would glitter with pride, as if his son were already a general.

"Haven't you ever wished for anything?" he suddenly asked Sara.

"And who hasn't ever wished for anything? The saints, maybe. As for me,—I, for example, pray the Lord to take away the cough and the red-apple colour from this creature here"—and she pointed to Marianna—"and give her a yellow face like Filomena's."

"No, I don't mean that. Haven't you ever wished to be a fairy, a princess, a queen? You used to tell me so many fables!"

"But only fables are full of such things. And that's why they're called fables," she explained, authoritatively. "O Cola!" she called, in her drawling, sing-song voice, turning toward the house. "Are you busy? Can you come here a moment? Don Filippo Rrubbè is here."

Nicola Torella came into the yard. He had a dark, cordial charcoal burner's face, and his eyes were sufficiently crossed to be queer yet not enough to look repulsive.

"O santo, santissimo!" he exclaimed in the voice of a good-natured ogre. "The signor lawyer. Are you on your way to your mother? And how about that accident? What happened to the boat anyway? You might have caught the pneumonia, God forbid. To every man his trade, says the old proverb, and it never fails. Lawyers for trying cases, and boatmen for running boats, sacri, sacripante."

"Shut up, you!" cried Sara. "You jack-of-all-trades. Cola 'Ngegno!"

She was plainly quivering with anguish at what the dolt had blurted.

"Has there been much talk hereabouts," asked Filippo in a very low voice, apparently without any perturbation, "concerning this?"

"What would you expect, my son?" and at every other word, when she thought Filippo was not looking, she shot a glance as dark as night at her husband. "Can you imagine that there has been no talk? The newspaper's spoken of it, too. The loafers at the apothecary's and at the casino have to have something to talk about. That's what small-town folk are like."

"And . . . what is it they say?"

"Idle gossip. Meaningless chatter. And now that you've come back to our midst they'll all turn quiet as mice. For none of them can talk as well as you."

Cola 'Ngegno had slunk off as stealthily as a wolf, without breathing.

"Listen to me, Filì," resumed the woman. "You'd better hurry on and make sure of a place, so that you won't be too uncomfortable on the way. I've got to be going and lower the gates at the crossing. Then I'll come back and see you off. Maso, carry the gentleman's bag."

Filippo got up. The horses were already harnessed, but their oat bags were still around their necks. Near the coach step was a group of four men, carrying on a discussion in tones of importance. Filippo recognised the owlish eyes, the round-cut beard, the leather boots of Enrico Stao. He knew, too, one of the three companions. They were political henchmen of the candidate and were working among the peasantry in his interest.

He stopped still at about ten paces from the group, and Maso, too, stopped and put down the bag. Filippo turned his eyes seaward, but became aware that Enrico Stao was scrutinising him and whispering something into the ear of the man nearest to him.

At length Stao came over to him, alone and slowly.

"Lawyer Rubè, if I am not mistaken."

"At your service, Signor Stao."

Each waited for the other to put out his hand. The hand of each, after a moment's perplexity, fell almost simultaneously back to his side. But Rubè had been the first to withdraw.

"Are you here on a campaign tour?" asked Stao. "Let's make the trip together. It's a pleasure for loyal opponents to travel together."

He spoke in tones of studied rudeness and watchfulness. His voice was suggestive half of the huntsman, half of the musketeer.

"No . . . really," Filippo had begun to reply, immediately after the words "campaign tour." "I'm on my way to my mother. No, not to-day. Perhaps to-morrow."

"I beg your pardon," continued his fellow citizen, "for not having recognised you at once. But"—and he looked closely first at his right cheek, then at his left, "your features have changed."

Having said this, he returned to his companions, first pressing Filippo's hand.

Filippo turned in relief back to the road over which he had come and went into the yard.

"What's your name?" he asked the dirtiest of Sara's little boys, taking him upon his knee.

"His name is Lilì," answered Filomena for the child. Then, turning to the boy, "Have you lost your tongue?"

"Then listen to me, Lilì," and he bent over, pressing a coin into the boy's hand. "Go over to Maso, on the square, and tell him to bring back my bag. But tell it to him as softly as you can, just as I'm talking to you now. Filomena, is there any way of hiring a buggy to take me to Calinni without any company?"

"Yes, sir, there is. There's Don Sante at Montebello, who has a buggy and hires it out. You have to send to him or write him a card, and then next day he comes down to the station with his buggy, if there's nothing else to keep him."

The bell announced the coming of the train.

He beckoned Maso to follow him, and climbed the platform before the tracks.

The locomotive advanced, shining, glorious, with its accustomed fascination; either get on, ride off, surrender to the will of an unknown guide, or let oneself be carried off by that wind and throw oneself under the wheels. He opened a door and took his place.

Sara was just in time to dash up before the train left. She looked for Filippo. Seeing those eyes, he had not the heart to hide, so he thrust his face out of the window; it was so yellow that it seemed as if he, too, had caught the tertian fever during his two hours' stay.

"What is it?" asked the woman in a wailing, soundless voice. "Is your grace leaving again? Aren't you going to Calinni?"

"Hush!" he whispered, leaning as far over as possible and signalling her to speak as low as she could, lest the other travellers should hear. "Hush. It occurred to me that my wife would be offended if I were to go to Calinni without her. I haven't yet introduced her to my mother. I'm going for my wife and then I'll come back with her."

"And what am I to tell Donna Giulia?"

"When do you see her?"

"At the festival of Saint John, on the twenty-fourth of the month."

"Why, then you needn't tell her anything. Within a week at the latest I'll be at Calinni with my wife." And he smiled reassuringly. "Hush. Good-bye. And thanks ever so much."

He waved her farewell.

CHAPTER V

The man directly opposite him was a bothersome traveller, much more in the way than the fellow who had barricaded the aisle of the train between Milan and Stresa. His arms and legs were as round and heavy as clubs, his hands fleshy, white, well cared for, though not over elegant, with a solid gold ring, in which was set a rather common stone, on the ring finger of his right hand. The most of the time he held his hands clasped over his paunch. He must have been nearer to sixty than to fifty, but no signs of old age had yet appeared, unless one were to consider as such his sparse hair (cropped close to the head by machine, thus allowing a view of his huge, pink, almost geometrically round cranium), or his pepper-and-salt moustache, which was likewise relatively short, though not cut in the American fashion, and disappeared into his spacious face. It would not be exact to call him fat. He was big, with his adipose tissue still consistent and his throat shining and solid. Out of such a piece of humanity could have been made four Filippo Rubès.

It was clear that Filippo, however slender he might be, would have to disturb him. But there wasn't another place in the compartment. Placing his bag in the rack and having adjusted himself as best he could, he felt the need of saying "Beg your pardon." The other man, however, made no reply, nor did he make the slightest effort to pull his knees in a little; which, for that matter, would have been unsuccessful. Neither did he move his eyes, which were large and clear, the colour of cold metal, and very similar in tint to the onyx in his ring. Those eyes seemed to see everything infallibly, yet to look at nothing.

At the first station where the stop was of any appreciable duration, Filippo got down and sent two telegrams, one regular and the other "rush." The regular one was to his mother and said that, having received news of his pregnant wife's ill-

ness, he had been constrained to return to Milan, but that as soon as she had recovered he intended to come with her to Calinni. The other was for Eugenia and said: "I am leaving direct for Milan, I will arrive in Bologna Sunday morning at 9:50. I will stop in Bologna for a few hours. I beg you to telegraph me 'rush' a few friendly words, to General Office, Bologna, letting me know if I may continue on my way." And he signed himself openly Filippo Rubè, for it wasn't worth while hiding his name in that place and under such circumstances. He also bought a prepared basket of lunch. He had certain pangs in his stomach that seemed to come from hunger, and he still felt uneasiness from Sara's excessively strong coffee.

His real intentions were these: He was not going ahead directly to Bologna because he had already spent three sleepless nights, and with another one, in all likelihood, ahead of him, it would be four. He needed sleep. Sleep and tears. He had suddenly come upon the discovery that sleep and tears are the two most paradisaical pleasures vouchsafed to men, if granted to them at all, by the earth. He would have plenty of time to weep after he rejoined Eugenia. The main thing now was to sleep. He did not care to buy a ticket for the sleeping car, for that would have meant giving his name again. He had the sensation of the various layers rising from his brain like the peel of an onion being fried; his tendons were growing stiff as ropes dried in the sun after a rain; the walls of his palate seemed to have been covered with molten tin. He feared or hoped for an attack of meningitis. It was absolutely necessary for him to sleep, through an eternity. But as these thoughts ran through his mind he was startled.

He foresaw things in somewhat this fashion: He would meet Eugenia at the Milan station,—tall, pale, dressed in black taffeta with white and black trimming. He would fall into her arms, just in time to hear two words: "Sleep, sleep." They would put him into a carriage; he would sleep for forty-eight hours, for a week, a month. Then he would awake, and there would be Eugenia, standing at his pillow. Then indeed he would weep his fill, until his eyes, his brain, his palate, would

flow again with the stream of life. But these were all vain imaginings. For the present he was anxious to reach Naples, and at Naples to engage a room in a hotel and sleep for about four or five hours. Then he would take a warm bath, for after all this sweating, and his sleepless nights, and the hundreds of kilometres covered in railroad journeys, and his hurried dressing, he could scent rising from his own body the beginnings of a wild odour such as had enveloped him in the trenches. In fact, this smell that he gave off must have its part in the antipathy which folks showed for him the moment they looked at him, and in the calm scorn that he thought he could read in the onyx eyes of the traveller opposite him. From Naples to Bologna he would like to travel in the space of breath. He had chosen Bologna because he had never been there and knew nobody in that city, and above all because it was necessary to select the most distant station if he wished his telegram to have time enough to arrive at Milan and her reply to have plenty of time to meet him. He imagined that this reply would read briefly and simply: "Am waiting for you. Your Eugenia." Then he would take the train for Milan; perhaps the very one that had brought him to Bologna, if he acted quickly. For, according to the time-table, there was almost an hour's stop at that station, —certainly enough in which to run over to the telegraph office and return.

And at Milan there would be Eugenia, before the gate of the track. No, for he was tired and feared the fatigue of hunting her out in the dense crowd. Better on the stair-landing at home. At the Restori home; and this meant that he would have to greet the colonel, thank him, and go through the accustomed devoirs. Here were complications that he hadn't thought about. But, patience. It would not last long, and this would be the end of his tribulations. Without the slightest delay they'd pack their baggage and be off to Calinni. With his wife at his side—such a wife as she, and pregnant,—he could walk along with head erect, defying all glances, not excluding that of Stao. His family and his paternity justified him, absolved him from everything. They would spend the summer at Calinni, in the fresh air. And then? He would

think afterward of afterward. The fundamental problem was to live a day, an hour of reconciliation with himself and life. That day, that hour, would decide everything. In theory, at least, it was by no means an absurd idea to retire with wife and child to Calinni, for good, and take up agriculture and petty cases of the common pleas court.

But when he had returned to his place in the compartment, after having begged the pardon of his fellow traveller, he did not know what to do with his lunch basket. It was too difficult, not to say impossible, to make the movements necessary to consume the contents, without annoying that severe, voluminous personage. He huddled as far back into his seat as possible, undid the package containing the drumstick of a chicken, and commenced overcarefully to nibble at it, holding his hollowed palm before his mouth so as to hide his chewing. The eyes of that man opposite were inexorable, like those of certain pictures of saints or portraits of one's ancestors, which, from whatever part of the room they are looked upon, seem to fix their gaze upon the looker. Filippo could not keep this up very long, and after a few morsels, which came near choking him, he threw the whole business out of the window. He had now only a little flask of red wine, and drained it to the lees.

The unknown traveller was dressed in the most old-fashioned manner. He wore shoes with elastic sides, striped trousers, a huge coat of black alpaca, buttoned tight. Certainly his collar was low and his black cravat had been bought ready knotted, but neither of these articles could be seen, for he had wrapped a white linen handkerchief around his neck to absorb his perspiration, and it was of dimensions proportionate to that vast circumference. His reserved manner during the journey would have appeared singular even to an observer who was not in Filippo's excited state.

Beside him he had a black leather satchel that he never opened; he had three or four newspapers which he never glanced at; out of his two coat pockets stuck several documents that he never took out. During all these hours but two different changes were observed in his position. From time to time, perhaps at regular intervals prefixed by some law of nature, he

would raise his hands from his paunch and place them upon his knees, which were wide apart. Then, after a period of about the same length had passed, he would lift them from his knees and lead them back to his belly. Exactly three times he extracted from his outside bosom pocket an oblong note-book, bound in maroon cloth, and, having opened it, would note down a short item. Though he wrote in pencil, he seemed to engrave the words upon the page in the conviction that they possessed an imperishable significance; and however fast the train might be speeding, it was certain that the line was inflexibly horizontal and that the handwriting was calligraphic. "Without a doubt," said Filippo to himself, although he knew that he was talking nonsense, "he's taking notes on me, against me."

He felt an unbearable need of engaging in conversation, of hearing what this man's voice might be like. He tried. Ever since his health had suffered, he had not smoked more than two or three cigarettes a day. The smell of the tobacco distended his nostrils and his throat, making him feel like vomiting. Now he extracted his cigarette-case and took a *macedonia* between his fingers. The compartment was for non-smokers, and besides Filippo and this man there were three men and a woman. Yet he turned only to the colossus, as if he were the only person in existence.

"Will my smoking disturb you?"

The only reply he received was a slow, tranquil gesture of the left hand, which, with the wrist remaining firm, was raised and then allowed to drop back upon the man's paunch. He lighted his cigarette and after a puff threw it away.

Besides being preoccupied by this unknown companion, he was concerned with several thoughts that he himself considered stupid, and yet they bothered him exceedingly. The least irrational of them was this: "I'm making a mistake by not becoming a candidate at the elections. Social reformers, the true legislators of the future, cannot come from the ranks of successful, satisfied men, such as this fellow opposite me, who are therefore content with society as it is to-day. The task of renovation belongs to the failures like myself. For

example, that project of mine for universal legislation was not at all a bad one. Sole Article: to each according to his merits. At the discussion I should like to propose an amendment. Article Two: All big books shall be thrown into the flames. Who knows whether my mother will be willing to send me the huge tomes of the History of the Consulate and of the Empire of Napoleon I? How many were there, anyway? Eleven? Twelve? This is the *busillis*. There must be none missing. I want to take them myself to the friar who sets them on fire. And have a mass celebrated for the repose of Don Demetrio's soul. By whom? Why, of course. By Father Mariani."

He counted the number of hours before they should reach Bologna.

"I'll reach Bologna Sunday morning. But Sara told me that Sunday is the Feast of the Trinity. Then it's clear, it's incontrovertible, that not only the Father and the Son will be there, but the Holy Spirit as well, who is a consubstantial and undetachable part of the Trinity. I believe those are the words. Reverend Father Mariani, here we are."

From time to time he glanced out at the landscape, which was as green as it can be only in the middle of June.

"Absolute green," he said to himself. "I wanted nothing but absolutes, and now I have even absolute green. And in my pocket I've got five thousand lire and a bit over; a tidy sum. I should say apoplectic green. Now I wonder whether that gentleman could have an apoplectic complexion? It would be interesting to inquire. No, it's not red enough. It's infinitely less red than the landscape is green. Italy is an apoplectic green. Apoplectically green with poverty.[1] In fact, what are all these riots against the high cost of living but apoplectic attacks against the excess of green? Those are things that the physicians don't understand. I'm cracking wonderful jokes to-day."

In order to distract his mind he calculated the number of kilometres the train had already run and how many remained,

[1] A pun upon *verde* (green) and *al verde* (high and dry, reduced to the direst straits).

from Pallanza, then Stresa, to the other points. It was a complicated affair, for he had to make the computation by memory. Now he was going to Bologna, and from Bologna to Milan.

"Considering that Milan is not far from Pallanza, I must admit quite frankly that I committed a mistake in economy and wasted money. I should have bought a round-trip ticket at Pallanza. It's true that I'd have had to pay extra for the trip from Rome to Arezzo and return."

"What a blow was that squall on the Lago Maggiore!" he continued. "And to think that the fish probably never even knew that it was going on. I'm rolling along like a ball."

And all at once he saw himself rolling in the form of an ivory ball across the cloth of a billiard table. "In fact Italy is as green as a billiard table. Greener. Then let's reason it out: I received a formidable stroke from a billiard cue while I was at a point that may be approximately designated by the name of San Maurizio. I land at Pallanza; cavalier Sacerdote. Edge. And another stroke. I land at Rome; Father Mariani, a Salesian,—highly beneficent order. Second edge. Another stroke. Arezzo; Federico Monti, physician-surgeon and philosopher. Third edge, and again, biff! Campagnammare; Enrico Stao, candidate of the opposition. Fourth stop and away. By Jove! What a stroke! That must have been the colossus. Now the fundamental problem is to establish whether I'll carom. The rule, in brief, is this: when you make your first stroke you must hit first the red ball, then the white. On the other hand, when a stroke has preceded, you may hit first the red or the white, as you choose. Now this game that I'm being shot about in,—is it the first stroke or the last? The white ball can be only Eugenia; but who's the red? H'm. The unknown traveller ought to know. He must have written it down in his notebook."

He was exasperated to find no way of speaking to him. As the man had three or four newspapers beside him, Filippo leaned over and extending his hand, asked:

"May I see one?"

He received as reply the merest movement of the man's

forehead. He took a paper and read it through methodically from the very first word in the very first column of the first page. In the middle of the fourth column of the second page, in the section devoted to news from the Italian cities, there was a letter from Pallanza.

"Pallanza, 11.—The suspicions which weighed upon the lawyer Filippo Rubè, after the unfortunate accident about which I informed you at the time, having been proved to be unjustified, the lawyer Rubè, who up to the present had been detained by the judiciary authorities, has been released."

"At last!" thought Filippo. "On the eleventh I was to dinner at my good friend Federico's. What service these newspapers do provide! An event of such capital importance announced four days after it happened."

Then he perused the item again, going through it syllable by syllable.

"It's an enormity," he said aloud, extending his chest and his left hand.

For the first time the colossus looked willingly into his face; but he said nothing. The other four passengers had turned toward Filippo, and were waiting for him to go on. He had said to himself that it was an "enormity that they should have freed that scoundrel," but he had not uttered the words because he knew that they would take him for a madman.

The four passengers imagined that he had referred to the revolts against the high cost of living and began to converse among themselves upon this topic, blaming the passive attitude of the authorities and recalling the most serious outbreaks. He, however, had read in the newspaper that "the situation was tending to return to normal," even at Spezia, and this time he had experienced neither pleasure nor displeasure. He had that news item from Pallanza forever before his eyes, even after he had folded up the sheet, and it seemed that his childhood ambitions ("to be a famous man, to be mentioned in all the newspapers, with his name upon everybody's tongue") might now be considered as having been accomplished. Twice, in the space of four lines, his name was printed in that newspaper.

"Thanks," he said, returning the newspaper to the unknown traveller.

"If he had a nice flowing beard," he continued to himself, "he might be the Eternal Father. Why not? The Eternal Father is always represented in this manner, as an unknown traveller. The unknown god. It's unpleasant, really, that he, too, should follow the fashion of sacrificing the honour of the chin. If he were the Eternal Father I'd have to be introduced to him at all costs and establish a long exhaustive conversation, so as to see clearly into all that has happened."

"When you come to think of it," he corrected himself, later, "I'm really the unknown traveller. Unrecognisable. I've changed appearance. I've no card of identification upon me."

"If I only were an unknown traveller!" he added. "Unknown to myself and to others. Nameless. Without memory."

He lived several instants of hope when the guard came around for the tickets. "Now perhaps I'll discover who this gentleman is." The colossus at last drew to the edge of his pocket the corner of a ticket, and the conductor, without waiting for him to pull it out any further, saluted him, raising his hand to the peak of his cap.

"He must be some eternal father of the bureaucracy, some high official, an inspector. A successful man." And from that moment he called him, to himself, The Inspector.

But he could stand it no longer to be forever before those idol-like eyes and those immovable legs that seemed the pillars of Hercules. So he reserved a seat in the dining-car when the waiter came through the cars announcing dinner. But the Inspector, too, reserved a seat, and when the time came he started for the dining-car. Ha, so he was not immovable after all. One could scarcely have believed it. Filippo made way for him and then followed. He took up the entire width of the passage. The alpaca coat was puffed into two balls at the shoulders. As he walked along he raised and lowered his legs powerfully, as if they were two tree trunks and at every step he had to root them up and sink them in anew. He must have been a trifle gouty.

As luck would have it they had been given seats facing each other, at the same table. During the entire dinner hour the Inspector did not utter a word. When he wished a half bottle of mineral water, he beckoned with his forefinger, which was as thick as a drumstick, and held it rigidly raised until the bottle arrived at its destination. It seemed that he ate more slowly than the others, that he was chewing his cud, yet when they had finished, he, too, was done, and he wiped his lips and his moustache in every direction.

They returned to their compartment, he in front and Filippo behind. He resumed his former place in the former position. Before many minutes had gone by he finally closed his eyes and fell asleep. He slept with his hands across his abdomen, with his head solidly resting against the back of the seat, his countenance perfectly serene. He did not snore. Filippo suffered throughout the night, and less through insomnia than through the impossibility of finding a comfortable position in which to move about or stretch his legs, unless he was to strike against the knees of the slumbering colossus.

Arriving at Naples he found happiness in the thought that he would now be liberated from this obsession. He even forgot his accustomed carefulness to descend among the last, and hurried out, making way with his elbow. He did not wish to see whether the Inspector got off or went on. He engaged a room in a hotel near the station, gave his real name because it was too much trouble to hide behind a false one, and then took his warm bath. He undressed, took out the revolver he had bought at Alessandria and placed it upon the little table. "I'd better forget this revolver at Naples. If I don't, I'm liable to kill myself." He hoped that the bath would ease his pains and make him sleepy. He had also left word with the clerk to wake him at a certain hour. He remained for a long time in the warm water, until he imagined that he was losing consciousness. "All I need now is to drown in a bath tub." And he jumped out, dripping wet. His eye caught again the bluish glint of the revolver upon the table. "It may well be that the unknown traveller is the Eternal

Father. But it will never happen that Filippo Rubè will shoot a bullet into his head."

He went to bed. When he got up he could not have said whether he had slept or lain awake. There had been no interruption in his life, yet the objects and the thoughts which had occupied him at that time had seemed to him more distant. It was still too soon to return to the station. He might go into a barber's and have those temple whiskers shaved off; but it would have disgusted him to have a loquacious Neapolitan barber say to him: "The gentleman wants to change his appearance." There was time to shave himself to-morrow, at Bologna. Not at Milan, for the barbers have a holiday on Monday. And in any event he simply must remove those whiskers before he met Eugenia. And in future he'd have to learn how to shave himself.

With his hands behind his back, he walked on, as if being led, toward the collegio where he had pursued his high-school and academy studies. It was a cloudless day and the sun was still high above the lofty palaces, though everything seemed to him distant and discoloured, immersed in the light of an immutable dawn, as seen in a dream. At last he put the question to himself whether he were really awake or walking in his sleep, and he did not dispel the doubt until, having entered the collegio, he realised that the janitor was not the same that had been there in his student days. The inner courtyard was a queer affair, with a presumptuous colonnade that was already in the shadows. Beyond the roofs could be seen in the sun an oblong cupola, covered with gilt tiles that gave it a resemblance to the side of a huge fish. Filippo had a vague recollection of Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch. The celebrated man, the *vir clarus*, delivered admirable speeches, then would place himself at the head of an army, storm a capital, conquer a kingdom. But behold, in his native city a second *vir clarus*, the opposing celebrity, would plot against him, and would send him into exile. Then the former would deliver a most admirable speech to his veterans, and civil war would break out, the soldiery setting out against their fatherland. The fatherland would put down the rebellion, would imprison the *vir*

clarus in chains, and punish him with a just death. In the meantime, still another *vir clarus* would arise in the republic across the border. He, too, would deliver wonderful orations, which the historian was able to repeat word for word, would place himself at the head of an army, would take that self-same capital by storm once more and reconquer that kingdom. And thus the empires and the capitals passed from hand to hand. Once one of these *viri clarissimi* even cut off the tail of a dog.

He would have remained even longer in this vestibule, had he not felt the sensation of being spied upon. He went out into the street.

"Why, the atmosphere of this school suddenly calls to mind those two verses that I've been hunting for three days."

The two verses were the last in the hymn that Father Mariani had recalled:

"Brilla nel guardo errante
Di chi sperando muor."

He declaimed them to himself in the nasal, sing-song voice of the pupil. All at once he was seized with a realisation of their meaning, and stopped with a start.

"Why this," he said, "is a death agony."

Now, as he sauntered along between the discoloured houses and the unfamiliar faces, he repeated ceaselessly these final words, for they sounded well to him and kept him company. But he had suddenly emptied them of all significance.

If he gave thought to anything at all, it was the absolutely inevitable necessity of sleeping during the coming night. If he were not to sleep on this night, as on all the others, then he would die of sheer desperation. He must buy a ticket for the sleeping car, at the cost of any possible encounter, any identification. It was inadmissible that there should be no place for him there. No one had a right to refuse him a berth, if there was a tithe of charity left on earth.

At the station he took it into his head to buy a fat book that was entitled *The California Scamp*. On the illustrated cover there was a little bit of everything: a wolf with his jaws agape,

a windmill, a beautiful woman with loosened tresses, a pirate ship. He did not read even half a page. On the train, between Naples and Rome, he made an accurate study of this dilemma: "Shall I or shall I not find a telegram from Eugenia?" The probabilities—even casual—of not finding one seemed to him very considerable. He weighed them one by one. The faulty service of the telegraph system was scandalous. His own telegram might have been delayed or gone astray,—the same with the reply. Eugenia might have left the Restoris. She might be at Arezzo. Or at Rome. She might even have died. He took out his watch and glanced at a hazard at the second dial. If the hand were between thirty and sixty, Eugenia would answer; if it were in the other half-circle, she would not. Or else he would open the book. If, at the page he opened, the tens were odd, she would answer; if the tens were even, she wouldn't. He even selected words from the context and counted the letters. Here, too, an uneven number was favourable, while an even was adverse. The fates thus consulted answered Yes, No, No, Yes, alternately, or in uneven series such as those of roulette.

At last he decided to question fate at Rome, in the shape of the sleeping car. If he did not find a place, Eugenia would answer; if he did, she would not. Two such misfortunes or two such strokes of good luck cannot happen together. The sleeping car was full. As the train from Naples had come in late, it was all he could do to find a gloomy second-class compartment.

"If Eugenia has answered me, then Providence exists. I'll become a convert to the faith; I'll take the sacraments; I'll be rebaptised, reverend, if you allow it, for my soul needs another bath, just as my body needed one this morning, at Naples. Don't tell me, reverend Father, that this is a wager, an insolent bet. It's high time to settle accounts with Providence, too. To every man his trade, says Cola 'Ngegno. Providence, if I'm not mistaken, comes from provide. Then if it exists, it ought to make provision. That's its office. Otherwise, what does it do? Go on a strike?"

At the Arezzo station he did not even care to show himself.

Instead, he appeared at the platform. The dawn was divine. Shortly after he heard the roaring of the headwaters of the Reno.

"How beautiful life must be! One can understand why the poets write entire poems to celebrate it."

Then he fell asleep. The sun was already torrid. As he slept, without losing consciousness entirely, he dreamed of the cover of *The California Scamp*, and of the unknown traveller; so that, when he was awakened by the rumble of the Bologna platform, he was surprised to hear himself say to himself emphatically:

"I make a formal demand that my son Demetrio be an unknown traveller over the earth, and that he shall have a name only for his mother, his wife, and his children."

"And for the telegraph employé," suggested an inner voice, softer and more sardonic, as the train stopped.

The Inspector descended from the same coach in which he had been travelling. He waddled down the aisle with his bulky person, placed one foot carefully after the other upon the steps and leaned heavily upon the railing. Filippo felt his soul oscillate like the needle of a compass, and was suddenly attracted to this magnetic mass. He followed him close behind, as when he had walked at his heels to the dining car and returned thence in the same manner to the compartment; mechanically he gave his bag to the same porter.

"Where are you going?" asked a station guard, after having saluted the colossus, as Filippo, following that personage, was headed for the square.

Filippo thrust out his chin as if to say: "I'm with that gentleman," and walked straight out.

Only then did he realise that the Inspector had left by a private door, with him behind.

"Where are you going?" asked the porter now. "With the commendatore?"

"No. Take the bag to the small luggage room."

"Then wait a moment."

Only to arrange the price of the service did the unknown traveller allow his voice to be heard. It was of medium volume

and perhaps a trifle thin; certainly not what might have been expected from a person of such size.

Filippo's face was never so upset as when he presented himself at the window of the telegraph office. It seemed to him that he would be felled to the ground as by a sudden blow if the official were to answer: "Nothing."

"Is there a telegram addressed to the General Office for Filippo Rubè?" he asked precipitously, as if he feared that his breath would not last through the entire sentence.

The man in charge looked into his death-stricken face.

"This man," said Filippo to himself, "has read all about the drowning and has recognised me." But he was no longer ashamed of his name.

"When should it have reached here?"

"This morning. Or yesterday. More likely yesterday."

"Rubè, you said?"

"Rubè."

The employé ran his thumb over several bundles of telegrams.

"Nothing for Rubè," he answered. And he put the telegrams back into the rack.

Eugenia had received Filippo's telegram a few hours after a letter from Federico, which gave her a succinct account of Filippo's visit and departure, concluding: "I believe, and Mary shares the belief, that you are at this moment indispensable to your husband and that you would do very well to try and call him back at once to your side. I don't believe he'll refuse, nor does it seem to me that there is any other way to save him. Time will heal all." She had remained with the Restoris, expecting to leave for Rome on the seventeenth. For she had always cherished a superstitious faith in Filippo's promise,—that he would return not later than the middle of June.

Federico's exhortation was quite superfluous. Her decisions as to the separation from her husband,—whether she should separate, and how and when,—were, according to her notions of the past few days, to be postponed to some other time.

For the present she must save the father of Demetrio. That was her duty. This notion of duty she drew from her instincts and from certain pages she had read, rather than from the education she had received, unless her father's example of inert kindness, which could turn out evil in effect, could be called education. So that when she received the telegram from her husband she interpreted it both as the fulfilment of a presentiment and an order,—a harsh order that had come to her from above. Bitterly she reproached herself for not having gone to Pallanza to wait there for Filippo's release; she repented having yielded to Giacone's advice, which had been inspired by a too worldly wisdom; even more did she repent having heeded the inhibitions of her own womanly pride. Now she reached a sudden decision to go to Bologna to meet him. She could not get herself to telegraph a message of love to him; but a conventional message of welcome, or, still worse, of magnanimous pardon, might, upon so excitable a nature as Filippo's (he had not even dared, as she could understand from the dates, to appear before his mother), have the effect of an insult, and even impel him to some desperate act. The only thing to do, then, was to leave for Bologna. Again she resorted to prayer, on her knees, and not in her accustomed manner, that she might have the strength to accept in resignation this trial which was not, as well she knew, the first nor the last in her troubled life.

Signora Restori offered to accompany her, for a pregnant woman should never travel alone. But she withdrew willingly before the courteous refusal of her guest, silently reminding herself of the expense of the trip and remarking aloud that between husband and wife no one should intervene. But she wished at least to accompany her to the station, and said to her: "Why, my darling daughter! And only in the fourth month! At that rate. . . Are you going to give birth to an Antichrist?" Eugenia suffered at these vain words as if they disfigured her.

She spent the night in Bologna and on the following morning took up her position at the head of the train until the last straggling traveller had passed. She stood out from the rest

of the crowd in her black silk gown with the white and black trimming, and it was impossible for Filippo to miss her. But even less possible was it for her maternal eyes not to catch sight of the unhappy man. Yet they did not see him. A profusion of possibilities at once unfolded like the ribs of a fan before her imagination: that Filippo had already committed some mad act, or that he had changed his mind again and his direction as well, as he had been doing ever since he had left Pallanza, or that he had fallen ill at Naples or Rome, or that he had stopped again at Arezzo. It occurred to her that he might have fallen asleep in some compartment, and she visited several of them, although she was somewhat embarrassed because of her visible maternity and the distress that everybody could read on her face. That he had left by any other way seemed inadmissible, and every station guard repeated to her that this was the only exit for the public. And if so horrible a thing had taken place,—if Filippo, having left by some private door, should have gone to the telegraph office to ask for a telegram, how was she to go on the hunt for an unknown man over all of Bologna?

Surely she had been stupid; she should have done both things at once,—leave for Bologna and telegraph him at the same time. It was her same old deficiency in initiative and presence of mind, as when she had allowed him to leave that night for Stresa. But she said these things rather to humiliate and punish herself than because she held any belief in the likelihood of her hypothesis. The supposition, indeed, was absurd. She ought to return at once to Milan. At Milan everything would be cleared up; she would find a telegram from Federico, or from Donna Giulia, or from Filippo; perhaps she would find Filippo in person. Nevertheless, before leaving she wrote out a telegram for Bologna itself: "Not having met you here I am leaving for Milan. I await you as ever. Rest easy." It mattered little to her that the man in charge eyed her with cruel pity.

On the way back there occurred to her, though the thought seemed somewhat far-fetched, the fanatic certainty that Filippo was travelling in the same train back to Milan. At the

Milan station she again watched the passengers alight and file by.

"No matter," she thought. "He must be home already. He must have come on another train, ahead of me. It's just like his impulsive character to do things like that."

Wherefore, as soon as she reached home, she asked in an imperious voice that was not at all habitual to her:

"Where is he?"

"My darling daughter!" replied Signora Restori, when she had grasped the meaning of it all. "What do you think? That I'd put him under lock and key if he were here?"

Filippo left the telegraph office and wandered through streets unknown to him. As he walked along he waited for some plausible explanation of Eugenia's silence to confront him,—some idea that would prove practicable for the immediate future. Against Eugenia, and this was certain, he felt no rancour. In all probability she was at Rome, and was preparing, with the assistance of Taramanna, who was an expert in such matters, to get a separation that should rouse no scandal. She was within her full rights. That she had come to Bologna was abstractly, but not humanly, possible. Eugenia might pardon him; but love him,—never. If she loved him, and had come, she would now be waiting for him at the telegraph office. Impelled by a desperate hope he turned back in that direction. She was not there. As for going inside and making personal inquiries, he did not dare. What could he say to the attendant? "Had such and such a woman come and asked whether Filippo Rubè had inquired after a telegram?" He feared the yellow, greedy eyes of the fellow, and his wordless reply: "What? Do you want to drown another woman now?"

He resumed his wandering. The heat of the prematurely canicular day forced him to breathe with an effort. He did not even exclude from his conjectures the fact that he had not found the telegram because it had gone astray, or had met with some other mischance. "What's the difference?" he said. "I never in my life believed in anything but Fortune, so that it's only just for Chance to decide. It decided, in the first

place, on the reefs of San Maurizio. Now it decides on appeal in Bologna." All at once he was seized by a disinterested, objective curiosity. "I want to see how all this is going to turn out." Many a time he had surprised in himself shamefully the wish that some sick person dear to him should die, or that some unfortunate friend of his should go down into irretrievable ruin; there had been no malevolence, no ignoble hope of advantage accruing to him; it had been merely a cerebral curiosity to witness the accomplished fact and render it homage. And now he was experiencing this frigid sentiment with regard to himself.

"How wretched!" he resumed. "The most clamorous stroke of good luck in my life was a win of fifteen thousand lire. Fifteen thousand lire; a sum that to-day wouldn't enrich a bootblack. And what happiness it brought me! Life is a festive table toward which ever since birth I was forbidden to stretch my hand. An impotent! Just as on that night at the Lapérouse Restaurant, when Celestine told me that if a person has no appetite it's better not to eat." He recalled a visit he had made many years before, in winter, to a mountainous district. The mountains lay in a half-circle around the greyish plain, all white in snowy splendour. He was in the train, a prey to horrible, unreasoned torments, and it seemed to him that the clear January sunlight was a precious liquor in a jewelled cup, and that he alone, of all living creatures, was prohibited from taking even a sip.

He went into a restaurant and tried to take a bite. The customers were in excited discussion about certain riots; but not the riots at Spezia. Rather in Bologna. They spoke in dialect, and he could not understand all the words. But now he recalled that he had heard the crackling of fusillades and the discharge of revolvers during that morning. He had paid very little attention to them, as if these sounds were quite familiar to his ears.

He went out again. The slate coloured sky could neither be breathed nor seen; the pavement was so burning hot that it appeared to be right over a volcano. It seemed that the earth was without a firmament. The proud palaces, of red brick,

were not of a red that Filippo would have called Celestine-red, but rather glowed like live coals. Certainly he could go right on to Milan. But if he arrived at night he ran the risk of not finding any room at a hotel. Could he sleep at the Restoris'? In Eugenia's room? Sleep was the supreme necessity. Then he'd spend the night in Bologna, go look for a lodging at once, and take his bag out of the luggage room. And what was he to do at Milan? Climb up the stairs of the Restori house? Resume his place as assistant at Giacone's? Rather return to Calinni or go back to Federico and accept his offer to intercede with his wife. "We'll see, to-morrow. For the present, sleep."

He did not know what direction to take and abandoned himself to chance. At times a passer-by, either more rapid in gait or more resolute in mien than most, would attract him with a sort of magnetic fascination. He would follow him for a while, as he had done that morning with the Inspector. One of these passers-by, imagining that he was being shadowed, stopped and looked at him out of inexorable eyes. Whereupon he removed his glance and walked off in the opposite direction.

The windows were being opened and shut with a hurried rattle, as when a storm breaks out. A strange hubbub, indeed, when there wasn't a single wisp of cloud in the sky! But few persons passed through the gloomy, narrow street, and they were in a hurry. Filippo then felt that the surface of the street gave way beneath his feet and became a steep descent. He no longer experienced any weariness in his limbs, and it was as if he had roller skates under his soles, and were gliding straight to the bottom.

As he thus seemed to be gliding down, he thought: "The horrible thing about our modern society is that it lacks all right of asylum. If I get terror-stricken, if I am pursued, whither am I to go for refuge? Where is there some Capuchin monastery that assures me sanctuary? If I seek refuge in a penitentiary cell, I find cavalier Sacerdote rejecting me, with sword in hand like an angel of the Terrestrial Paradise. I know where my redemption would lie; in becoming a peasant

and tilling the soil,—a workman, even at the Adsum,—a sailor on a vessel that would require six months to make its voyage. But who'll take me? What trade am I good for? Why, I'm a good-for-nothing! I'm an intellectual!" He thought of leaving the country. He would land at New York, he would get somebody to procure him the most humble position, the most servile possible, even becoming anonymous. But whom did he know in New York? Marco Berti. The notion of seeking the assistance of his wife's brother to become, let us imagine, a fruit-vendor, appealed to him strangely. He recalled certain persons of his native district who had committed real crimes, and who had been sent to prison. Then, after five or ten years of this they returned. Their family received them, their wives resumed obedience to their will, their children kissed their hands; they returned to their accustomed tasks, earned their bread, and their companions looked upon them as equals, with neither suspicion nor pardon. They were not cut off from all intercourse, like him, Rubè. "This means," he thought, "that the common people do not obey the law of honour, but cherish in their hearts a law higher than that of honour."

He heard the rising murmurs of a mob. Near the beginning of the street, through a thoroughfare yonder, amidst the walls that glowed like live coals, a procession was advancing. He felt his heart bound. He recalled the fascination of the fifteenth of April, when he, too, had wished to join the shooting, and felt the revolver in his case. Any violent spectacle at that moment would have brought him pleasure; but he preferred to learn that they were Bolsheviki. He saw a few men go by in green and grey, and thought: "Here are other combatants like myself whose blood the government has sucked out, and now it denies them bread." No sooner had he thought this than he beheld the red flag flying amidst the red palaces.

"Ah, here it is," he exclaimed to himself. "The red ball. The first half of the billiard game is over."

He was close to the wall that the crowd was brushing by. As he was still very weak, one of the mob, skirting along the wall in the opposite direction, involuntarily thrust him off the

sidewalk and cast him into the human stream. Now he was a prey to fear. He felt his legs give way beneath him, and he would have fallen had there been room to fall. He raised his coat collar, despite the intense heat, so as to hide his bourgeois aspect. But precisely because of this he was recognised and they cried to him in scorn:

"Cry *'Hurrah for Lenin!'"* And he repeated: *"Hurrah for Lenin. Hurrah for Russia!"* in a stifling voice, so as to save his hide. Here was the portrait of Lenin upon a poster. "A dog's face!" he said to himself. "But at least here is a god whose home and whereabouts are known; he really exists; you can go to him and demand a reckoning and an account of himself." And he shouted "Hurrah for Lenin" in a voice that grew clearer as he cried. He shouted "Hurrah for Bolshevism!" . . . "Yes," he thought. "Bolshevism,—universal prison barracks. But there'll be a place for every one in that prison. And every one will be equal and anonymous."

Somebody thrust a red rag into his fist, and he seized it. Another said to him: "Here, grab this; it's prettier," and stuck a black flag into his hand. In his left hand he held the red flag and in his right the black. He staggered along zig-zag, trying to reach the head of the procession and work his way free. There was no other escape. To one fellow who looked more credulous than the rest he said: "Let me pass; I have an important message to deliver to the leader." As he had two banners in his fists and was hoarse with all this shouting hurrah for Lenin, they bruised his sides but shoved him forward.

He heard a shout: "Close ranks!" It did not come from the paraders. When he had almost reached his objective he heard another shout: "The cavalry!" And this came from the human stream. It seemed as if the crowd, pronouncing that word, seethed like foam. He heard it with a vast delight. The cavalry was coming. It would disperse the mob. He was free.

But he was already at the head of the procession. And it was enough for him to look askance at the faces of those who were nearest him, pressed together in an inhuman, useless effort

to retreat, to understand that there was no way of escape. The street ended in a large square, and the entire front of this square was crammed with the cavalry. They looked to him like the waves of the Lago Maggiore in the tempest,—these grey-green cavalrymen with the crested helmets.

As he gazed at the narrow empty space, which was already filling in, still another thought came to him, as dazzling as a discovery: "Eugenia was at the station this morning. But it was my fate to follow the Unknown Traveller."

Then there was just enough time left for him to catch a glimpse of the first cavalryman that struck him. He was a very young man, blond, with a calm, kindly face. Certainly his eyes were the colour of the sky.

CHAPTER VI

Gherardo Valsecchi, secretary of the Adsum, who came from Emilia and had a married daughter at Bologna, had taken advantage of the Sunday to attend the baptism of a new grandchild. The ceremony had been a quiet one and the feast most auspicious, with only friends and relatives present; nor had the sounds of the shooting disturbed the festivities in any sensible degree. Rather, the excesses of the mob had provided the guests with an agreeable topic of conversation, —a topic that had already been explored in every direction, and upon which they all agreed most heartily. The generous libations of wine had warmed all rancour, and the only differences that existed were with regard to the means to be adopted for the salvation of the social order. This one was for wholesale firing squads, the other for the abdication of the king and the dictatorship of a victorious general. The polite dispute was protracted until the moment in which the happy young mother came around with the drinks, followed by the happy young father with a precious box of Havanas which his brother, a chancellor in an embassy across the sea, had brought to him free of duty. But he had kept it unopened, reserved for such a sweet domestic occasion as this.

Now Valsecchi, seated in an armchair near the window, to catch a breath of air, was sipping a beaker of yellow Certosa and the news in the evening paper. From time to time he would cool himself with a Japanese fan. Among the few seriously wounded at the demonstration on the square there was a man around forty, with somewhat greyish hair and short temple whiskers. The injuries from the horse's hoofs that he had all over his body, and especially in his stomach, had so shattered him that his case was considered desperate. He had not recovered consciousness, nor had there been any way,

up to time of going to press, of identifying him. In his pocket he had about five thousand lire in bank-notes, a railroad ticket detached in the train two days before, on the Campagnammare-Milan line, and a luggage check. When the bag had been opened, nothing was found inside that could lend a clue to the name of the unknown traveller. As to marks, he had two scars, one on the chest and the other on the back, corresponding to the position of the right lung. After reading and rereading this report Valsecchi sought a hurried telephone connection with the home of Roberto De Sonnaz, at Milan. He had been following Filippo's most recent trials quite closely, since the episode of the drowning in the lake and the release from the Pallanza jail.

"Forgive me for disturbing you," he said to the brother of the head. "I should like to read to you an excerpt from a newspaper report that will interest you."

He read. Then he said:

"You see, I have people here in the house, and I can't leave them. And then the city hasn't quieted down yet. I'm sorry that I can't go myself to the hospital and identify him. The greyish hair and the temple whiskers don't gibe. But all the other features . . . All the rest . . . It seems to me there can't be any doubt."

The man at the other end of the wire grunted ill-humouredly and said a somewhat gruff good-bye.

The entrance to the Restori home was closed, but De Sonnaz made such a noise that it was opened to him. Eugenia, who had dressed in haste, received him. He expected her to fall in convulsions and thought that he would have to carry her fainting form in his arms. Instead, the woman's face was almost impassible, except for an exceedingly rapid tremor at the corner of her lips, which had turned bloodless. She was now prepared for everything, and she would not have been surprised to hear that Filippo had committed a crime or had killed himself. The news that they brought her was, in a certain sense, less frightful. "Yes," she said, after she had been apprised of the description, "my husband was wounded in the right lung."

De Sonnaz was sincerely agitated, and it was all he could do to repress a sob. He said that he felt inconsolable to think that twice in succession, by an atrocious caprice of chance, bad news should have to come, directly or indirectly, through him. He told her that the other time, when he had announced himself and she had not cared to receive him, he had not known that Filippo was gone, and had come to offer him an important case that might have meant the beginning of his professional fortune in Milan. For he had never been able to rest easy after that discharge from the Adsum, although he himself had not been to blame, and was eager to make reparation by helping Filippo in other ways. But such was his fate, always to come too late. And as he spoke thus, he held Eugenia's icy hand in his own.

At length she freed her hand. And, since De Sonnaz offered his services profusely in any possible case "that might arise in so sad a contingency," she asked him to send off at once two telegrams. One was for Federico, whom Eugenia entreated to leave immediately for Bologna. "He's a physician," she explained to De Sonnaz, "and was my husband's best friend." The other was for Donna Giulia Rubè, and this was so worded that Filippo's mother could not complain of being held in the dark, yet that she should not consider the wounds as being surely fatal, and thus wait for further details before undertaking a useless, harrowing journey.

There were no night trains. Eugenia left by the first morning express and desired no company. Now she was not ashamed, as on the day before, of her visibly rounded abdomen. She was thinking that within a few days she would be taking that same train back, returning then to Rome and resuming her life as a daughter amidst her family, availing herself, in order to support herself and infant, of her father's money, accepting silent comfort from her father's humble eyes and returning him a comfort equally silent. "What have they done to me, poor woman that I am! Good for nothing—unless, oh, yes, good for this, certainly, if God gives me strength—unless it be to give birth to a little child and bring it up." She resolved, if the creature proved to be a girl, to rear her differ-

ently, to make her a free woman, strong, capable of living, if need be, in solitude with herself.

No sooner had the identification of the unknown traveller been officially established than there was plenty of discussion in the public gatherings and even some in the newspapers. The Bolshevik faction tried to inscribe Filippo Rubè upon its roll of martyrs, although it was somewhat embarrassed by the excessive amount of money found upon his person. The other faction insisted upon a version diametrically opposite, and spread it with resolute intransigence. Filippo Rubè, an immaculate citizen, a glorious veteran of the world war, had been fired with disgust at the sight of this filthy mob, and, seized with a sudden, irrepressible fury, had all by himself charged against the crowd. The truth of this thesis was supported not only by the stupid unlikelihood of the Bolshevik hypothesis, according to which this patriot, this wounded captain who had been decorated for valour, would have been converted overnight, during a stop of a journey, to the most ferocious Bolshevism, but also by the black flag that had been found in Rubè's hands,—which, certainly, he had, by an act of superb rashness, snatched from the ruffians. Very few of either side referred to the "unfortunate incident upon the Lago Maggiore," and then only in passing, without attempting any absurd connection with the events of yesterday.

Nor was Garlandi idle; he wrote a letter to the newspapers in which he lauded the virtues of his highly esteemed friend, exalted the incomparable warrior fallen in battle, and recalled, with details and irrefutable circumstances, the gathering of fellow fighters in which Filippo had taken part two months before, "carrying into the debate," Garlandi assured, "the fire of his passion together with the precision of his compelling logic." He concluded by calling Massimo Ranieri as witness "against the base Socialist vermin heap that dared to besmirch the memory of a stainless hero." He signed in full: "nobile Meuccio Garlandi, captain of the Arditi."

A delegation of Bolognese veterans visited the hospital and called upon Eugenia, whom among themselves they already

termed the widow, to offer their condolence and the homage of the patriotic citizenry; and also to furnish themselves with food for discussion. Eugenia had her own opinions upon what had happened; but rather than an opinion, it was a phrase to which she could give no precise sense. "Filippo," she said to herself, "was drowned in the crowd." She did not even try to reconstruct the events of the previous day in chronological detail, so readily did she recognise the futility of that effort. But she wished to receive the delegation and listen to it for a few moments, standing in the doorway in case Filippo should regain consciousness. She spoke but little, moderately, and prudently; but enough to authorise, in general, the judgment of the veterans against the contrary thesis. "No, he was not crazy!" she exclaimed to herself. "He was no renegade, was the father of my child! For otherwise, I'd really have to give birth to an Antichrist." For those wretched words of Signora Restori would not leave her mind.

Federico received the telegram too late to leave before noon. Few things could be so painful to him as returning to Bologna, where he had left such gloomy memories. But naturally he did not vacillate. Mary wished to accompany him despite his stoutest protests, and had never been so insistent since the first year of her marriage. But he was firm in his refusal, and a glow of momentary, inconfessible jealousy passed across the woman's face.

He entered the hospital less than two hours before dusk. Filippo was lying unconscious on his back, with a bandage across his face, which a horse's hoof had grazed and covered with blood. His eyes, visible above the bandage, were closed, and seemed as if they never again would open. From time to time a physician in a white shirt would appear at the door and ask, "Anything new?" Federico would bow his head. A priest, whom Eugenia had sent for early that morning, was praying in a corner.

Eugenia felt an unconquerable desire to say something to Federico; but she wished to say it without any tears in her voice, and for a long time she feared that she lacked the neces-

sary strength. Then she felt that she had found it, and without looking at him, but gazing at the swallows in the paling sky, so as to maintain her composure, she said:

"Never again in my life shall I know what peace means."

She told him of her "unpardonable folly . . . perhaps crime" in not having telegraphed to Bologna as Filippo had requested. She could not imagine how he could have escaped her at the station, nor could she picture, except in a most confused manner, what had happened after that in the soul of the unhappy man. But one thing was certain: that, if he had found the telegram, he would have gone on to Milan. And he would have been saved.

"And you really believe that all this depended upon receiving or not receiving a telegram? And you take the blame? Was it you who sent out the cavalry, too? Do you really imagine that he was merely a victim of chance? Filippo was a self-destroyed man. He beheld all possibilities and had lost all standards. A lost man. He could find peace only in death. If it hadn't been this time, it would have been another, and perhaps a worse occasion. And he might have dragged you over the abyss with him; you and your child."

He spoke in a muffled voice so as not to be heard or make a noise, but in that sort of authoritative anger which the physician uses in rebuking a sick friend.

"The thought that you have just expressed to me belongs to the category of thoughts that destroyed Filippo."

She shuddered slightly.

"Think of your child," continued Federico, glancing at her waist. "I, too, hope . . . I should like to have children. Several. One of them would survive. Our children will pardon us."

She moved her lips, praying mentally to Him who can do all things, to save her unborn child and to cast all evil thoughts out of her mind. "But," she reflected, "I was thinking only of myself just now." And she returned to her prayer, begging that Filippo should awake before death, that he should open his eyes and see her. She did not wish to exalt herself nor the pivotal importance of the duty that had brought her to that

place, yet she desired without cease that Filippo should see her before he died. From time to time the dying man would breathe more strongly than during the day.

Now night had fallen, and a blue-shrouded lamp was lighted.

All the previous night and the greater part of that day Filippo had lain, lost in the dimness of the consciousness that had left him. Then, in the darkest depths of that consciousness, as at the furthermost bottom of a narrow well that reaches to the bowels of the earth, a tiny light had appeared; dim, incalculably dimmer than the bluish gleam that hangs from the top of the trains at night without shedding any illumination; small, so tiny that it was motionless, and if it had flickered it might have gone out,—tinier than that which burns in the body of a fire-fly. It seemed that he was sleeping, at last; that he was dead. And that absurd fatigue of living which had been nothing but the fatigue of not dying! He did not feel ill. Certainly he would meet again the Inspector, the Unknown Traveller; but that worthy could not be too severe with him, for he had suffered much and had hated no one. These were voiceless stammerings, tremblings weaker than the secluded mutterings of the tiniest shell. But if they had a meaning, such it was.

Now he would have wished that the tiny light should rise from the bottom of the well, rise higher, higher. And the light rose, and with it rose his pain. But it was not too painful. It was like the slight, crackling tear of two leaves that have been stuck together and are slowly pulling apart through the excessive heat; the tortureless laceration of pain that is about to cease forever. But he wished to suffer worse, to have the light rise ever higher. He tried to open his eyes, to see whether the eyes can be opened in the world of the dead. Then twice he shook his head. For several hours he had been breathing at intervals. And once, feeling a stitch, he groaned. He opened his eyes.

At the foot of the bed, standing erect and tall, was Eugenia. Two paces behind her loomed the black form of the priest, who showed him the cross. In the least lighted corner, in-

visible to the three and to the physician who had just come and was lingering upon the threshold, Federico was half kneeling, although the movement, because of his tall stature and his wooden leg, was not of the most comfortable.

Then Filippo, whether seized with a desperate desire to get back his grip upon life or with pity at the sight of Eugenia's abdomen, contracted as much as could be seen of his face and his shoulders in an attempt to sit up and stretch out his arms. Eugenia drew near, and placing her hands ever so gently upon his shoulders, helped him to lie back again slowly.

"Sleep. Sleep," she murmured to him, with her forehead upon his.

And she cast a long glance of love into that glance which was already dying out.

As he sank into death he heard the olden plaints of the violoncello. But it was no human voice that repeated the strains to him. And the long feminine fingers that lay upon his closed eyelashes had lost all weight.

THE END

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